

THE SOLIDARITY CENTER PODCAST

Domestic Workers: Leading, Growing, THRIVING

Host: Shawna Bader-Blau, Solidarity Center Executive Director

Guest: Adriana Paz Ramirez, IDWF Latin America Regional Coordinator

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I was so touched by a domestic worker leader that said in one Congress that, "I have nothing to give my daughter as an inheritance, like money or a house, but I'm giving her this movement because this is changing our lives, because this is changing our countries, because this is changing history." That is the significance of getting themselves into a union. If the women at the bottom of the bottom are raising up, all of us are raising up.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Hello, sisters and brothers and welcome to the Solidarity Center Podcast, an interview show that highlights and celebrates the individuals working for labor rights, the freedom to form unions and democracy across the globe. I'm your host, Shawna Bader-Blau. I'm also the executive director of the Solidarity Center in Washington, D.C. We're the largest US-based international worker rights organization. We empower workers to raise their voice for dignity on the job, for justice in their communities and for greater equality in the global economy, and for one just future. As we begin today's show, I want to give you a quick update on our sisters and brothers and Belarus.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

In a recent episode, we talked with Sergey Antusevich, vice-president of the Belorussian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, who described how union members are on the front lines of efforts to end government repression. Since then, we know of four union leaders arrested and four workers who went on strike at an oil plant who are now on trial. Union organizers have been jailed for two or more years for unbelievably disrupting public order. Many workers have lost their jobs or face huge legal fees because of their effort to promote free elections on the freedom to form unions. These brave women and men are risking everything for a chance at democracy. There are ways you can show solidarity. We've included some resources for you to take action in today's show notes, and you can follow this developing story on solidaritycenter.org.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Now, back to today's show. Since the COVID 19 pandemic, we've heard a lot about essential workers, the women and men who take care of us in so many ways. Grocery store cashiers, nurses, firefighters and food service and delivery workers. We've also seen how these workers have been forced to work without protective equipment or even laid off without wages during lockdowns and staff cutbacks. Among them, domestic and home care workers. They are some of the least visible, yet there are more than 67 million domestic workers worldwide, primarily women who work long hours often with no days off, they care for our children, our elders and people with disabilities, cleaning our homes and cooking our meals. But in many countries, domestic work isn't considered essential or even considered work.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

My guest today, Adriana Paz Ramirez, will share with us how domestic workers in Latin America have joined together to turn the challenge of the virus and lockdowns into a moment of change and possibility. Adriana is the Latin America regional coordinator of the International Domestic Workers Federation, IDWF. The IDWF is an awesome global membership association that advances the rights of domestic workers. Adriana is a really special person. I had a great time with this interview. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

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Adriana Paz Ramirez:

My name is Adrianna Paz, I am born and raised in Bolivia, and I am based in between Mexico and Canada. I work with International Domestic Workers Federation, and I am the regional coordinator for Latin America. The IDWF it's the first and the only global union federation that has been founded and led by women, grassroots women from the Global South. That in itself is an unthinkable achievement for so many in different sectors and that's the power that it has. Today we have 66 affiliates in 78 countries, a little bit more than half of a million individual domestic workers members.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

So, we're going to ask some questions about the situation with domestic workers in Latin America under COVID. But before we get started, maybe with that, maybe we could orient our listeners about the overall situation of domestic workers in Latin America.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Sure. Well, who are the domestic workers in Latin America? They are 90 percent women, mostly black women, indigenous women, migrant domestic workers and the majority of them are the breadwinners of their houses. And many of them, I will say 50 percent, according to our surveys, are single moms. We can see the impacts of patriarchy. I will say that the domestic work, it is really a continuation from a slavery times. We call it modern servitude because in many countries like with a big Afro-descendant population, like Brazil, Colombia, Peru, domestic workers used to be slaves. And now they are domestic workers in other countries with a huge indigenous population like Peru, the Andean countries, Bolivia, Guatemala, they are mostly indigenous women who also were servants of the Spaniard conquest or oligarchies, the Latin American oligarchies in the beginnings of the republics.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

They have been not only excluded from legal protections and social protections, but they were not even considered as workers. So, often their payment has been room and board or old clothes from the employers that are given to them in lieu of payment. I think most of them today, most of them make less than minimum wage, one out of four work without social protections, and it's still there are conditions under which they work are one of the worst, because of these intersections of different systems of oppression, like class, gender and race.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Could you say a little bit more about not being understood as a worker? People who work every day, work hard and long hours, and yet are not seen as a worker.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I think it has to do a lot, it's rooted right in patriarchy and colonialism. The employers and society in general, they assume that because they are women, naturally they know how to cook, how to care, how to clean and therefore you don't need to learn any skill for this. So, their work has never been regarded as work and therefore they have never been regarded as workers. One of the first articulations of the rights of the Latin American domestic workers movement, back in the beginning of the last century, our first unions can go back to 1930s in Brazil, in Peru, in Bolivia. So, the first articulations of the right has been for them saying, 'we are not members of the family, we are not part of your family, we are workers.' They even had to challenge the labor movement to say, "We are workers and our work is

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work." And they say, "This is the work that makes all the other work possible. Everyone is connected through care. We have received care or we gave care."

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Well, so there's almost a hundred years of history in Latin America of this predominantly female, largely disenfranchised workforce organizing into organizations and unions. That's really incredible. What does it mean for domestic workers when they form a union? What is that like? I know you've seen, and been with many domestic workers who have organized their first union, can you tell me a story about a woman who had that experience?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

That's a great question, Shawna and I will say it, a little bit of the Latin American movement, they have been the first one in creating a confederation in 16 countries that the confederation of domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean. So, they started to dream big 30 years ago and created this confederation. When they are first able to organize themselves and to organize themselves into a union especially, it is like they are breaking free. They are re-dignifying themselves. They are bringing back their humanity, recognizing themselves that their work is valuable and that they deserve rights and protections as anyone else. It's really putting themselves at the same level of humanity that any other human being of any other worker, because they are mostly black women, indigenous women, we know that under colonialism, the arguments or the reasoning of their oppressors to exploit them, it is saying that they are less than humans.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

So, when they unionized is because they had to break through all these internal discourses, intergenerational traumas, intergenerational oppression, and to take this major risk step, it's liberating and creating a social movement. It is I think one of the most incredible testimonies of the capacity of women to really lift themselves up, and in lifting themselves up, I think also changing the course of history. They understand that, and I was so touched by a domestic worker leader that said in one Congress that, "I have nothing to give my daughter as an inheritance, like money or a house, but I'm giving her this movement because it is changing our lives, because this is changing our countries, because this is changing history." That is the significance of getting themselves into a union. If the women at the bottom of the bottom are racing up, all of us are raising up.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

It's a powerful image when you say it that way, quite inspirational. I know, Adrianna, that you work very closely with individual women, domestic workers in their collective organization, that you meet a lot of individual women, you do workshops and have a methodology of working to help build a voice and union power with women. I wonder if you could tell us just a little bit about that.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Sure, and thank you to the Solidarity Center that is always working with us in experimenting and innovating different ways of building worker power. For us, working and building leadership it's quite crucial to sustain the movement over time, the movement it's all that it needs a continual renewal. So, for us in IDWF, it has been very important to start approaching leadership building from a very humane aspect, which is really taking the angle of the approach of a woman.

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Adriana Paz Ramirez:

We do not lead in the same way that men lead. We do not want to replicate leadership structures and leadership models that men do. That means top down hierarchical, the one that yells the most is the most powerful one, because we have different ways. For our leadership and methodology, the most important thing, it is the starting at the level of the individual and that means creating foundational skills. We call foundational skills when you are able to first really be in touch with yourself and to develop critical self-awareness about the moments and the places in your body where you were deeply wounded by systemic types of oppression.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Most of our leaders, since they were born, they have been facing and surviving in different systems of oppression, which taught them to survive in ways that are translated into political action. Healing that those ways of surviving to translate this into a more cheerful, healthier, democratic, non-hierarchical political action is crucial for us. It is in us to lead in these ways, is just really creating the space and giving the space to see each other and heal each other. Added to that, then we built technical and political skills for the leaders to be leading with their souls, with their bodies, and of course, with the strategies in place and analyzing power and building work and power.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

When you were talking about multiple intersecting forces of oppression and that one of the methodologies is to start with the individual, I can imagine there are some really powerful conversations that you've been a part of in those transformative moments. Can you tell us about someone you have worked with, and some of what she shared going through that kind of transformation?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Absolutely. Unfortunately, one of the most common experiences for domestic workers is gender-based violence. Most of them have been working since they were 12 years old, 14 years old, and domestic work is performed in their close worlds, closed doors, high walls. So, it is in isolation. And so, their experiences as a woman have been shaped by sexual harassment and violence. For them, getting to recognize the traumas that those experiences has meant in their bodies, in their brains and also in the way they lead as political leaders, it's a major breakthrough. It is scary, it is frightening at the beginning, but then finding everyone else that had similar or different experiences, I think that in itself has a lot of power and value. The transformation that we see in our leadership training courses, it's quite amazing. Even the body shape changes and they are so grateful to have this experience and to work at the human level.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

They often say, "We are humans first." And bringing these spaces where they can feel their whole humanity and relate to them in that sense, with respect, with care and love, and translating into political action. One of the concrete results of these leadership trainings, for example, is that in six months of these trainings, then we saw increase in recruitment of members in the reunions up to 2,000 new, sorry, 9,000, new members among 26 organizations. It means immediately democratizing their union structures and sharing power without being afraid because they have been afraid, they have been surviving, but always with fear, so transforming this it can be quite powerful. There are so many stories

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where they break down and then rise up through the leadership trainings. And yeah, they really love this approach to building power from the inside.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Is there any woman you're thinking of, as you're telling me this and remembering back on those trainings, a case of somebody who you were very moved by?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

So, as I was saying that I was thinking in my, compañeras from Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil, Nicaragua, all of them have a story to share. Gender based violence is the common thread, but also being regarded as La Negra, Black, Indian, Indigenous all these insults to themselves that further root, kind of like disengaging from their bodies, disengaging from their value. Yes, I can think in so many of stories and how they were able to join to a union and become a leader and then going to these training, it is a whole history when we see how they have been breaking every barrier along the way.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

And we're of course having this conversation a year into the global pandemic, and the pandemic has affected all workers and livelihoods globally. But can you share a little bit in Latin America? What has the pandemic been like for domestic workers?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

It's been tragic. It's been the worst impact in terms of job losses, right? We have done a regional survey last year in May, in the first wave of the pandemic, and we found that in 14 countries, 50 percent have lost their jobs, but it can be even worst in some countries like Colombia, 70 percent of them lost their jobs. In central American countries, between 60 percent and 75 percent, depending on the population. But the worst is that they already entered into this deadly pandemic without any protection. They didn't have any savings. As you can imagine, they were living day to day. So, all of a sudden being dismissed has meant not only poverty, but hunger.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

They were sharing with us in our WhatsApp groups, saying how really they have to go and try to get some breakfast or lunch at the church, because most of the family members also losing their jobs, their kids, their partners, the ones that have partners, and so it's been hunger. Nevertheless, to also share the bright side and the resilient side of the movement: They have been gaining new members. Most of the unions have recruited new members. They were very, very quick in realizing that collective action and social unionism model had to be in place. Before any source of financial support arrived, they started to organize themselves into these communal community pods, organizing food in their neighborhoods, bringing their members and just bring the potato, bring if you have onions, bring your onions, if you had a chicken, bring chicken, and cooking a collective meal.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

That is strategy, that is really coming from a huge empathy and a big heart. It meant political action, because the other domestic workers who were not unionized in their neighborhood, then they realized that, "Wow! The union it's the only one that is helping us." So, they started to sign up union cards. No job, maybe not union activity, but these social unionists model had meant that they are gaining new

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members, more members and they have been able to really connect with the needs of their membership, and they started to then advocate and to create and develop national campaigns and regional campaigns.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Well, so you're saying that domestic workers, who are 50 percent of them in Latin America, single moms, many of whom paid at, or below the minimum wage, families they work for losing jobs and domestic workers losing jobs and livelihoods, and still coming together collectively to find ways to support other domestic workers in a time of hunger and despair. Where does that empathy come from? That spirit and that energy?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

It's amazing, isn't it? I think because they know what poverty is, because solidarity is not only a nice precept or concept, but because it is a way of living, I think that shows immediately when they know that they have to take action. Domestic workers know how to fight back collectively and unlike other sectors in the labor movement, they never had the two main tools to fight back, which is the right to strike and collective bargaining. But they do have other strategies and this resilience, this creativity to really, to not leave anyone behind, it doesn't matter if they are union members or non-union members, for them they are workers, they are mothers and they see themselves in all these ranges of their humanity. And this builds social movement, this builds unions. And this is women's leadership out of like a great compassion.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

And through this leadership, we're seeing, you've mentioned growth in domestic worker unions membership, despite COVID, despite these circumstances, how many people are members of domestic workers across the Americas?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Unfortunately, their rate of unionization in Latin America, it's between 1 percent and 2 percent. It's still very, very low. There are almost 20 million domestic workers in Latin America. Our biggest union is in Argentina, around 80,000 members, but this also it's because of the particular history of the labor working class in Argentina. But in general, I think we're in a sector unionizing, it's a challenge, but for domestic workers is even more. We still have to do a lot of work to unionize, but it's crazy that under the most difficult circumstances they are growing their members. Their recruitment drives in pandemic times, it's been impressive.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Care work must be valued work. And that means the workers who take care of our homes, our children's and ourselves must have safe jobs, decent wages and basic protections like unemployment pay, health care and sick leave. In Latin America, domestic workers are understanding their power, becoming leaders and making real change at their workplaces and in their communities. Our conversation with Adriana Paz, continues after the break.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

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Hi there, it's Shawna again. I just wanted to take a minute to invite you to check out RadioLabour, the international labor movements radio service. RadioLabour produces daily newscasts about union events and issues and it also produces special programs to support labor campaigns around the world. Check out RadioLabour@radiolabour.net, and find out more about worker rights struggles around the world and how the movement is supporting their efforts for decent wages, fair treatment and strong communities. Follow and subscribe @radiolabor.net.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

What are some of the achievements of domestic workers in the time of COVID, some achievements for their organization, some achievements, policy achievements, achievements they've gained at a national level or local level?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Sure. Well, first of all, I would like to share that at the beginning of the pandemic, most of them have united into a big regional, if not the global campaign, which is *cuidar a los que te cuidan* in Spanish, care for those who care of you. This has been their banner and under this-banner, the main demands across the countries has been demanding the inclusion into government protections, emergency protections for salaries, employment and inclusion into the social security. Most of them have been left out and the major achievements have been for domestic workers union to get into these social protection emergency programs for themselves.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

That is the case of Dominican Republic, that is the case of Argentina, and that is the case of Peru and Chile. The other demand was the paid quarantine demand. Argentina was able to get that for domestic workers that are over 60 or those who have little children. Then Chile it's impressive, they were able to get the unemployment insurance. All other sectors have unemployment insurance, they didn't. Now they are covered by unemployment insurance in times of pandemic.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Peru was able to get a new domestic workers law, starting with a written contracts because this is a strategy to overcome informality. If you are under informality, your employer can dismiss you easily. So, for them was very important written contracts, but they also had a new domestic workers law.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

So like, maybe people work in a different location every day? Tell us more about the situation with informality that workers are trying to overcome in the domestic work sector than during the pandemic.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Yes, yes, exactly. Informality, it's translated into not being covered under any social protection. It could be working for the same employer five days a week, but also can mean working for multiple employers one day or a few hours. But the main thing is that under this modality, they do not contribute to the social protection programs or systems in their countries. Most of the countries do not have a social protection program that is adequate for these workforce. So, basically not having any labor protection and social protection means that they can be dismissed at any moment. We can talk to programs about

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social protection, various for domestic workers but in the pandemic, we saw that this is a crucial key element to really fight for and to achieve implementation for social protection.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

And part of the key struggle of the global working class and working people in the pandemic is maintaining livelihoods, despite the loss of income and lockdowns, and the achievements of domestic workers that you've mentioned to be covered by their country's laws and receive some of those supports is phenomenal for those families. I know in a lot of parts of the world, many domestic workers are immigrants from other countries. Sometimes they are migrants from different parts of the same country where they travel internally to work in a different part of the country than where they're from. Is that true in Latin America?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Absolutely. There are about 12 million migrant domestic workers, and imagine if, for the national workers, it is hard to be covered by social protections. Migrant workers by law are excluded of all these protections. And their situation has been really critical, but again the unions have step up. And most of the unions, those who have a physical office, were turned into shelters for domestic workers who weren't able to pay rent and lose their jobs. The other national domestic workers had their houses or families, but they didn't have any place where to go and that's where the unions became their main house.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Where are some of the, give me an example of a country context in which a large part of domestic workers is from some other place they're immigrants or migrants?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Traditionally in Latin America, the more stable biggest economies have been Argentina and Brazil and Chile. So, we have big populations of Bolivians, Peruvians in Argentina and in Chile. In Brazil, also, from different parts of South America. Big cities, São Paulo, have a big population, even Filipino and African migrant domestic workers, you can find in São Paulo and the union has been amazing. They have been unionizing and working with them overcoming language barriers to work with them. I think, yes, the Venezuelan migration, there is a huge diaspora in Colombia, as well, and Ecuador.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

So, I'm a Bolivian woman, I've moved to Argentina to work in my profession in the care economy. I'm a domestic worker, and then COVID hits, and there's a lockdown. If I lived with my employer, would I be kicked out? Do I maintain the home? How did that work under this pandemic period in Latin America?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

We saw two main scenarios. One is that, yes, you could be kicked out because the employers also probably lost their job and doesn't have any money to keep paying a domestic worker. And where do you go, right? If you do not have connection with the union or family members, most likely is that you will try to return to your country. And we have seen at the border of Chile and Bolivia, many migrant workers being locked down, and not being able to cross the border because borders were closed. So, they were stuck and starving at the borders.

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Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Other situation can be that you are maintained, kept working, but for months there are migrant workers that have been for six months, eight months without seeing anyone and working of course more than eight hours, working 14, 16, 18 hours. So, it's a level of exhaustion and not being able to go out and they don't want to lose their job. So, you are either confined and locked down for months, or you could be on the street or at the border or at the union.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

That takes me back a little bit to where you started when you were describing who are domestic workers and the legacy connected to slavery, which is of course across the Americas. I'm thinking now, as you're describing domestic workers who are at home, at their employer's home, during the pandemic being asked to work 14 hours a day. And I'm wondering about that connection that you started with to colonialism and to slavery. When workers are coming together as domestic workers and forming unions, you were talking about that as a powerful experience for individuals and collectively, I wonder what role do you see domestic workers playing as we come out of the COVID crisis?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I think the role of domestic workers has been crucial in exposing the vulnerability and interconnection that we all have as humans, and the role of care in our lives and in societies and international economies. It's been very ironic that most of the countries in Latin America have acknowledged that domestic work and care work it's important. There are even some governments that have attempted to categorize domestic work as essential work, but yet not giving all the protections, the labor protections, employment protections, salary protections to these essential workforce. So, on one hand, it is acknowledged that they are valuable, but it doesn't translate into the implementation of the labor and legal frameworks of protection.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I think most of the regular people, families have also realized that without these jobs, they wouldn't be able to do their other jobs. I don't think there is any doubt that these work in the pandemic has been valuable, has been valued, but now it needs to translate into how justice looks in legal frameworks.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

And the International Domestic Workers Federation, of which you are a part and a leader, organizes across borders. And I wonder, like when you're thinking about the future coming out of the COVID crisis, what role does International solidarity play in the future?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I think this pandemic, Shawna, has taught us that something that we listened often in matches and political rallies, but now it became really real: Until no one is free, until no one is safe. No one will be free or safe if there is a sister, if there is someone that is still vulnerable to COVID or exploitation or hunger, all of us will be. I think the role of international solidarity is precisely to bring this message and to actively perform these actions that tell us that your safety, your well being, it's mine. It never was so tangible and so real like in the pandemic.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

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We're all connected is so tangible in the COVID crisis. And yet, where you started with talking about injustice related to race, racism, discrimination, poverty, affecting domestic workers who come from parts of the region, maybe where the predominant population is Indigenous, other places where migrant workers have been predominating in domestic work. All of us are stronger together, but all these other divides and barriers are still showing up in how we all relate to each other. I wonder how you think about organizing in the face of all those divisions that keep us separate when we should be connected.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Yes. Well, I think this is the utopia that make us wake up every day to all of us who are working on this. Yes, the pandemic, like you said, made us understand that we are all connected, and we are all connected through care, right? And organizing to basically dismantle capitalism and patriarchy. It is a work that needs to be, as I said, at the beginning, going back to the leadership training programs, it starts really at the individual level, looking at our stories and connecting through these care, acknowledging these deep humanity that we have. We have to really start debunking and challenging so cool to be a flexible worker, so cool to be in informality. You don't have to pay taxes.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

So, I think it's breaking through all these false discourses and it's coming back to what the pandemic taught us. We are all connected through care and let's just start healing from the inside, and this is political action in itself. To rebuild the economy, I honestly think that if we don't pressure governments to either create or implement labor protection, social protections, that means care for all, or implementing the legal frameworks that we have, we are not going to overcome the effects of the pandemic.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Do you have any, like short-term goals in the next couple of years that you're working toward with domestic workers unions in the region?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Yes, we do have dreams and goals. Latin America is one of the regions that have, okay, I won't say good, or very good legal frameworks for domestic workers. We have 15 ratifications of the ILO, International Labor Organization convention, C189, on decent work for domestic workers.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

However, the implementation, the agenda of implementation of decent work for domestic workers, is still a blue unicorn for most unions to achieve. And I will say for most sectors, the implementation of laws it's what is major. So, the pandemic has exposed that it's going to be so difficult to overcome poverty if we do not really provide the population that is essential for care with these implementation of the legal frameworks. For all the unions, their goals, medium term goals, is to keep advocating and implementing social protections, labor protections, unemployment insurance. We are talking about 22 million families in Latin America and most of these women, as I said are breadwinners, single woman. So, it is a matter of social justice. It is a matter of breaking social inequality. Governments need to understand that if we want to overcome poverty, it is really addressing the conditions of women like domestic workers.

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Shawna Bader-Blau:

And democracy is in the news these days has got some problems in different parts of the world with democracy. And I wonder when you're talking about domestic workers organizing, how do you think about democracy? How does women coming together forming unions relate to democracy to you?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Democracy for me, looks when the most affected ones are at the center and at the front of their own struggle providing the needs, the spaces, the time and the resources for the affected ones, the women to figure out, explore, experiment new ways of understanding and building power. That in itself is democratizing the power that the population has to decide what is the best, and involving everyone, creating democratic structures. Unions in essence are those organizations that bring the voices of the workers, balancing power, sharing power, challenging power and all those exercises are what we try to do when we talk about capacity building, when we talk about leadership training. It's exercising those skills, but it's also decolonizing yourself, your body, it's departure decolonizing your body, because all those systems of oppression live so much inside us among us.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

So, I'm working at that level of our organizations, and domestic workers are honestly one of the prime examples of how democracy looks like. I think every group, every social group will find their version of democracy, but when we see domestic workers movement, you can sure find an inspiration.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

What does decent work for domestic workers look like to you?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

It is to be able to work. First of all, like they say, first of all, to look at them as workers, as valuable members, the reward that they perform, it is so essential to not only survive, but to thrive. It is putting at the center, the values of care, solidarity and humanity. Through the work that they perform, will receive that, right? For them to be able to have their work recognized as so valuable in society and themselves, and women's work. And this recognition being translated into policy, into laws, into social protections, into having a decent place where to leave and having a decent name. And in so many countries, they are called so many different names. They are not called their name, they are called something else.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

For them, it's claiming back their humanity. It's part of a decent work agenda. Work without harassment, free of violence. For many of them, silence and submission, is a condition of their work that is not decent. So, those are some of the elements that will make decent work.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

And as an activist yourself, with a deep commitment to justice and equality and dignity for everyone, what inspires you? What keeps you going? What is your drive?

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

THE SOLIDARITY CENTER PODCAST

Domestic Workers: Leading, Growing, THRIVING

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I think it's my family, Shawna. My grandmother was a migrant farm worker from Bolivia in Argentina, working in sugar cane plantations. After she moved to Argentina as an undocumented worker, she started to clean houses and work as a domestic worker, then she moved into cooking and selling food on the streets, because she found that she was more respected and free if she was not working as a domestic worker.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

I've learned the story of my grandma many years after I was working with farm workers and domestic workers. But I think it is without consciously knowing, I think it is in our intergenerational connection with my grandma that makes all these connections so open and so real with everyone else, with all the domestic workers. So, many people say that organizing is not personal. I say it is personal. It has to do with us, It has to do with our personal experiences, and if we can translate into political action, I think these words makes us activists.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

We experience intergenerational trauma as you shared in the beginning, but that story of your grandmother and how it inspires you, is a generational power.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Oh, thank you, Shawna. That's beautiful.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Thank you so much for your incredibly important story.

Adriana Paz Ramirez:

Thank you. Those were great questions. Thank you for the opportunity Shawna.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

Talking with Adriana, what really struck me is how domestic workers in the region are committed to transformational leadership development that empowers grassroots feminist leaders across Latin America to challenge patriarchal standards that the "traditional leadership" seems so desperate to reinforce.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

It's a model that the International Domestic Workers Federation is putting into practice all over the world. In the midst of incredible hardship, domestic workers in Latin America have come together through their unions and associations to take care of each other, and to use their collective strength to push for the legal rights they deserve as workers. The power of unions is the power of workers working together for each other and for all of us. Like the domestic worker whose best inheritance for her daughter is this movement. This solidarity. As Adriana said so beautifully, "Solidarity is not just a concept, but a way of living, of taking action."

Shawna Bader-Blau:

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Thanks again to Adriana Paz, whose vision of international solidarity is an example to us all. And thanks to you for listening. Don't forget to subscribe to The Solidarity Center Podcast on Apple podcasts or wherever you find your shows and learn more about the Solidarity Center at solidaritycenter.org and through our social media on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Tune in next week, as we talk with Ayuba Wabba, president of the International Trade Union Confederation, and president of the Nigeria Labor Congress.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

He will talk with us about how unions in Nigeria have worked to ensure front-line health workers have good salaries and social protection as they provide care throughout the COVID-19 crisis, and how workers everywhere can--and must--build back a better world for workers after the pandemic.

Shawna Bader-Blau:

This podcast is a production of the storyproducer.com with executive producer, Tyler Green and producer and engineer Adam Yoffee. The Solidarity Center is a member of the Labor Radio Podcast Network. And special thanks to the staff of the Solidarity Center, who assisted with this podcast. In more than 60 countries around the world, we work to ensure a righteous future for workers, dignity, freedom, equality and justice. For the Solidarity Center Podcast, I'm Shawna Bader-Blau. Thanks for listening.