

APTIV autoworkers in northern Mexico are close to a strike

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More than 4,300 autoworkers in the northern state of Tamaulipas, Mexico are in the midst of extended contract negotiations against auto parts manufacturer APTIV, formerly known as Delphi Automotive. The Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas workers confront not only a ruthless corporate management, but also a union leadership that is seeking to impose a sellout contract. After repeatedly pushing back the deadline, the union has set a February 8 strike date.

APTIV is the world's largest auto parts manufacturer and one of the largest private employers in Mexico, with nearly 67,000 employees in almost 40 cities. The former Delphi Automotive, based in Troy, Michigan, split into two companies in December 2017, Delphi Technologies and APTIV. Delphi was the former parts division of General Motors and was spun off from that company in the late 1990s as part of a cost-cutting drive. The company later filed for bankruptcy, imposing massive concessions on its US workforce that were implemented with the assistance of the United Auto Workers.

In their current contract negotiation, the autoworkers from the two maquiladoras in Ciudad Victoria, APTIV I and II, are demanding a 30 percent salary increase, from 140 to 182 pesos a day (about US\$10). However, APTIV is only offering workers an insulting 3 percent increase—a paltry sum that does not even meet the rise of inflation during the past year (6.7 percent) and is substantially less than the 10 percent salary increase that the workers received in 2016.

Citing “union conflicts” and a fall in production, APTIV fired more than 700 workers from the plants in Ciudad Victoria last year. The slashing of 14 percent of the maquiladora's labor force has compelled many workers to take on additional duties without being compensated. Meanwhile, APTIV has started rehiring

workers and is using the contract negotiations to impose what amounts to a wage cut.

Unable to come to an agreement, representatives from the company and the majority union at the APTIV I and II plants, the Maquiladora Workers Trade Union, have been meeting with the Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration since early this year.

Dolores Zúñiga Vázquez was elected union head at both APTIV maquiladoras last March after the ousting of Mercedes López Lozano, who was widely discredited for her ties to management, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), and the corrupt Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Zúñiga Vázquez headed negotiations last year.

In March of last year, 6,000 workers at the APTIV maquiladoras went on strike because the company refused to recognize Vázquez as their elected leader. In a show of strength, what began as a strike of 3,000 workers expanded to a mass work stoppage.

Despite the manifest militancy of workers, the Maquiladora Workers Trade Union has repeatedly avoided calling a strike, even after promising to call workers off the job if the company did not grant the desired wage increase by January 19. By delaying the call for a strike, the union has had more time to dissipate the anger of workers while working with management to prepare a sellout.

APTIV and the CTM have repeatedly threatened to shut down the maquiladoras in Ciudad Victoria if workers do not come to heel. Edmundo García Román, head of a Tamaulipas union tied to the CTM, recently stated: “It is possible that the maquiladora will leave because of Mrs. Dolores's incorrect strategy to pressure like this for issues that have caused damages, strikes, and even kidnappings. I do not think that any company wants this type of leadership.”

Workers should reject the lie that there is no money to improve their living standards and working conditions. APTIV reported \$256 million USD in net income during the last quarter of 2017 alone, almost a 9 percent increase from the same period in 2016. APTIV CEO Kevin Clark made over USD \$10 million in the last year. His salary has almost doubled since 2012 alone. Clark makes in a single day almost what APTIV workers would earn if they worked 365 days of the year.

To be successful in their struggle APTIV workers must develop a strategy to fight not only the company, but against the sabotage of the pro capitalist and nationalist trade unions. Dolores Zúñiga has already admitted that she will accept a 15 percent raise for the workers, but even a “successful” negotiation of a 30 percent wage increase would still condemn the workers and their families to poverty. In the era of globalized production, the union will inevitably agree to enforce the company’s brutal working conditions to convince them that their profits will be highest by using them as a labor police.

Autoworkers have immense social strength. Mexico is the seventh largest auto producer in the world, with over 810,000 autoworkers. Internationally, the auto industry employs millions of workers who are intimately integrated along a production chain across different nationalities, ethnicities, races, genders, and religions.

In the US, tens of thousands of autoworkers are concluding that the sellout contracts imposed by the corrupt United Auto Workers (UAW) must be nullified and renegotiated, while in Romania, thousands of autoworkers organized a wildcat strike in December against a contract that does nothing to improve their living standards. This week, the IG Metall union in Germany shut down a strike by hundreds of thousands of workers and agreed to a contract that reduces wages and bans further strikes. Autoworkers all over the world have the same enemies. It is only by uniting their collective strength internationally that autoworkers can take on these transnational corporations in the successful defense of their social rights.

We encourage autoworkers to sign up for the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* to coordinate their struggles with their brothers and sisters internationally.



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