

GM worker in Mexico speaks in support of fight against plant closures in the US and Canada

Our reporters
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Last week, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* contacted an autoworker at the General Motors plant in the city of Silao in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, who had expressed support on social media for the February 9 demonstration against plant closures by GM in the US and Canada.

After watching the **press conference** announcing this protest, the worker, who is using the pseudonym “Mario,” quickly responded: “We are in the same situation. For us, the union doesn’t exist except for loans. They do what the company tells them. It’s a great shame what is going on [with the plant closures], and we are not getting anything from it.”

Mario indicated that GM is investing in Silao by automating the body assembly plant and remodeling the stamping plant. This is increasing the work load for each worker and some coworkers with higher seniority are being pushed out. “They have their hands on our necks,” he said. “It’s impossible to do anything. I work here 48 hours a week for 2,200 pesos (\$114), more hours, less money and people are bogged down in a sewer. If you stop working, you are stuck in a very impoverished life.”

According to company data, 19,000 of the 54,000 GM workers in North America work at four plants in Mexico—in Silao, San Luis Potosi, Ramos Arizpe and Toluca. Last year, GM became the largest carmaker in Mexico. The Silao plant has almost 7,000 workers.

WSWS: Can you please describe the general working conditions at the GM plant in Silao?

Mario: We do engine assembly and general body assembly. At the general assembly plant, there are more problems and workers often resign after three or four days there. At Silao, I also hear that GM will fire some

personnel. They’ll assign work for one person that should be for two workers, so people quit.

What is the role of the union there?

No, the union doesn’t intervene to help us at all. It’s dead there. If an accident happens, the union doesn’t care. This is the concern of engineers and GM managers. They themselves cause these accidents. Accidents happen because the line runs way too fast and one worker does operations that should be carried out by two people. They simply give you a talk about security and that’s it; the issue dies there.

In Silao, can you describe the average life for a workers’ household or family?

In Silao, León, Irapuato, some people have homes and are still paying for them. I don’t know how we pay them. They are small houses, probably smaller than those in the US, and they are very expensive. Life is very expensive here. I mean, people try to make enough money to survive and live a normal life.

What do you think and what have other workers discussed about the struggle in Matamoros?

People are not being informed about that. They don’t know what is happening in Matamoros. Not until recently did I hear about the strike here in Irapuato at General Mills. People are simply tired of the trade unions because all they do is charge dues money and keep that money, and no one ever knows what happens with that money. They never give any to us and nothing ever happens. It’s only there to do nothing. In fact, we are investigating how to create a new union here in Silao. We don’t know if it will be at the level of Silao or Guanajuato. We only need to get more workers to support this and many are telling me, yes go ahead and investigate. A friend who is a lawyer is giving me some

advice. And another worker who knows a bit more about this is also looking for advice.

Recently, I had a discussion about Matamoros and heard about a lawyer helping them and that they were confronting the trade union to get a raise and a bonus. The unions used to negotiate those bonuses without workers saying anything, but workers got tired because the bonuses were not enough, as well as their salaries, even with the the end-of-year bonus, the employer contributions and the vacations. Workers didn't receive any of this before, but now they do because salaries are so low. If salaries are low, you get a higher bonus. They are doing that in Guanajuato as well.

Workers in Guanajuato are not that happy, but salaries are a bit higher than in other states, and that makes some more tranquil. The problem revolves around the negotiations of the allowances given each year. Last year, there was a problem with that, receiving much less money than what was expected. Workers didn't know what the issue was, and no one communicated this, so workers stayed quiet with expectations of better benefits on the negotiations this year.

What we saw as most important in Matamoros was that as soon as workers realized that the companies and union were stealing their bonus, they organized independently through rank-and-file committees to carry out wildcat strikes. What do you think about building rank-and-file committees?

Yes, I support that, and many don't want a trade union and that is why we are investigating this. We are stuck though since people want to do things quietly, under the water, so that the company doesn't notice the movement that is building up. Currently, we are checking to see if the company can have more than one union. Our co-worker that is looking into legal issues is checking to see if a majority of workers sign a form, we can leave the CTM [Confederation of Mexican Workers] but what happens is that they want to do everything legally. This co-worker agrees with the need for an international movement, but he is doing it independently because he thinks the US and Mexico are very different, with different laws and different unions. This is where I think you can help to communicate with GM workers in the US.

If workers from even two shifts would unite and strike, that would mean a lot of money lost for GM, but

workers are currently blind, fearful of losing their job. However, people do want to get the CTM out of here because it charges a lot of money per worker, at GM that is about 60 to 70 pesos weekly. If the new union is the same as the CTM, people will conclude that it's no different. When we see this, workers will rebel and say, "well, we were even better off with the CTM."

At the demonstration in Detroit against GM plant closures, workers said they were not "asking" anything from GM. The thousands of layoffs and destruction of entire towns are not under negotiation. However, GM workers in Canada and the US need the support from other workers across those countries, Mexico and beyond. The trade unions do two things: they advance a nationalist perspective and defend the "right" of the capitalists to maximize their profits in the name of remaining "competitive."

I will discuss this with fellow workers to see how many people agree. We'll see how many support an independent union or some other movement and we'll see what we decide.

I do want to send a message of support to GM workers in the US and Canada: Keep fighting and keep your expectations that unity will make all of us employees strong, being those at the bottom against all of those making a lot of money. GM workers here are with you and support your struggle against closures and against the unions!



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