

Striking Coca-Cola workers rebel against union in Mexico City

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Hundreds of Coca-Cola workers in Mexico City and the neighboring State of Mexico have launched a wildcat strike against the transnational corporation and the pro-company union. The strike, which takes place in the heart of Mexico and the largest city in the western hemisphere, is yet another sign that the working class is moving into struggle against the world's most powerful companies around the world.

About 200 workers at the distribution center in Tlalpan, Mexico City, decided during a mass assembly outside of the plant on Friday to strike. On Saturday, Coca-Cola plants of similar size in the Mexico City suburbs of La Viga and Zaragoza joined the strike and supported the demands advanced by their coworkers in Tlalpan.

On Monday, workers at two more distribution centers in Iztacalco and Mixcoac stopped work, halting the distribution of Coca-Cola from the centers in the impoverished industrial belt on the southern periphery of the megacity. Though four of the plants were coerced back to work, there is no contract and the situation remains volatile. Another plant that walked out Wednesday remains on strike.

In recent weeks, Coca-Cola workers in Mexico have been compelled by management to sign an agreement that cuts their food vouchers and paid vacations, and eliminates sales commissions that can comprise from a third to a half of workers' incomes.

"Sign your resignation or sign this piece of paper," management told the workers.

As anger grew at plants, workers began talking to one another on social media.

Workers' demands were democratically discussed and evolved quickly from getting their commissions back to deciding that "the solution is signing a new contract" with major improvements, particularly the

8-hour day.

The strike was carried out in opposition to the company and the pro-company union, which is affiliated with the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC). "Our trade union simply didn't do anything to support us on the question that we have really heavy workdays for unjust salaries," one Tlalpan worker told reporters.

Management moved to threaten workers that they would not only lose the commissions but also all their seniority. Executives speaking to workers at the mass assembly sought to divide them, asking, "does at least one of you, because someone might, want to have a dialogue inside, to come in and talk?" All workers angrily responded "no!"

One worker yelled at a union leader: "Slaves used to work from daylight to daylight: they would enter at 7 and leave at 7. We don't even have that. I leave at four from my house and come back after 10." Workers receive 294 pesos or \$15 per day and work six days each week.

La Izquierda Diario interviewed striking workers who said: "One day, my son asked if I didn't live at the house anymore because he never sees me."

On Tuesday night, the company forced workers to sign that they agreed to the elimination of their commissions in exchange for no reprisals, with the CROC union and the company executives both continuing threats against workers. However, on social media workers warned Wednesday that "a strike already occurred in 2012, but union leaders sold out and nothing happened, and many got fired."

The relief for the corporation was brief. At daybreak Wednesday, dozens of workers at a Coca-Cola distribution center in Coecillo, Toluca—35 miles west of Mexico City—walked out against the elimination of the

commissions, with workers reporting that it signifies losing a third of their income, along with demands of a shorter workday.

Demonstrating the simmering opposition across the country, strikers in Toluca told reporters of *La Izquierda Diario* they had not heard about the strikes in Mexico City. “Our interests are the same as theirs,” one worker said.

The superexploitation faced by Coca-Cola workers led them to carry out strikes even before the recent cuts. Some 400 Coca-Cola bottling workers in the northern border city of Matamoros struck this spring. The strike lasted more than two months, beginning as far back as January 31 as a wildcat strike demanding a 20 percent raise and US\$1,600 bonus and lasting until April 5. Matamoros Coca-Cola workers walked out amid wildcat strikes by more than 70,000 manufacturing workers in maquiladora sweatshops in the city, which ended in a sellout agreement involving 140 firings.

On June 5, about 30 Coca-Cola drivers in Santa Rita, Durango, struck for a day to protest the 14-hour days and the elimination of paid vacations, with *Milenio* noting that workers simply dismissed any interaction with the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) union.

Beyond a short piece by *Forbes* on Friday, focusing on the statements by the corporation, the corporate media in Mexico and internationally has been completely silent, fearful that Coca-Cola workers will decide to join their resistance against the cuts and even join the struggles of workers in other sectors amid the ongoing resurgence of working-class militancy in Mexico and internationally. These fears by the ruling class were reflected by a sharp fall of 1.44 percent in the stock prices of Coca-Cola Femsa, the branch in Mexico, as news of the strike in Toluca broke.

The approval by the Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) administration of a labor reform demanding that “independent” unions be allowed to compete for representation through a majority vote has produced a wave of activity among opportunistic trade union careerists backed by pseudo-left organizations—including the Socialist Workers Movement (MTS), which publishes *La Izquierda Diario*, the Stalinist Mexican Communist Party (PCM), the Political Organization of the People and Workers (OPT), and numerous others—hoping to replace the

established and hated company unions of the CROC and the CTM.

This happens amid growing opposition to the administration of López Obrador and his bourgeois party Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) as it subserviently obeys the dictates of the fascistic Trump administration by sending 21,000 troops to the borders to crackdown on Central American immigrants. AMLO is also obeying the dictates of Wall Street through aggressive corporate tax cuts along the industrialized northern border and an open “austerity” program involving mass layoffs in the public sector.

The main objective of the labor reform and the reason why both big business parties of US imperialism and sections of the Mexican ruling class are promoting this legislation was explained by the Secretary of Labor, Luisa María Alcalde, to *El Financiero*: “With the reform, we reduce the chances of strikes like those in Matamoros because more authentic union representations, guarantee talks and no strikes... attracting dialogue and productivity.”

Mexican workers must expand their fight for the social right to a decent salary and the eight-hour day. Combatting one of the largest and most powerful transnational corporations like Coca-Cola requires an international struggle in alliance with their class brothers and sisters across Latin America and in the US and Canada. Workers must build rank-and-file committees independent of the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade unions to expand their struggle.



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