

GM fires and harasses Mexican workers to speed up production

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On September 12 at 7:00 pm EDT, the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to organize this struggle. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

Five days before the expiration of the contract for 160,000 US autoworkers, workers at the General Motors (GM) complex in Silao, central Mexico, reported on Monday that management is accelerating production and using repressive measures against militant workers.

The move is part of the corporation's international strategy to increase production internationally in case of a strike in the US. But because Mexican Silao workers oppose speed-ups and do not want to undermine the struggles of their brothers and sisters in the US, the company is resorting to dictatorial efforts to fire and terrorize workers at the plant, which employs 6,000 workers. The company is nervous because 8,000 GM workers are already on strike in South Korea, greatly strengthening the position of autoworkers across North America.

According to the daily *El otro enfoque*, workers in Mexico are attacking "unjustified firings" and "also denounced a series of 'extraordinary jobs' " they are forced to work. The newspaper wrote that these moves come "ahead of the imminent strike that could begin at the assembler in the US on September 14." Workers added that they are being forced to work overtime that is "underpaid and under grueling conditions."

Workers in both the US and Mexico are also opposed to the trade unions, which in each and every country work with the corporations against the interests of workers.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with Israel Cervantes, one of those fired from the Silao complex. Cervantes says that he was singled out and fired on

August 28 for discussing leaving the pro-company union affiliated to the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) and demanding better conditions.

"I've worked there for 13 years and have a record of zero reports. I don't take leaves. I've won recognition in the areas I've worked. A few months ago, I recovered 50 units that were practically going to be discarded. What does the company do in exchange? They say, 'He is raising dust, better fire him under any pretext,' " declared Cervantes.

GM claims that he tested positive for drugs, but Cervantes took a test at his expense and posted it online showing clean results. He indicates that "the union never showed up, but the factory's industrial security came and dragged me out like a criminal. They wanted me to sign my resignation to avoid paying my settlement."

Cervantes also confirmed reports of a "speed-up," explaining: "They are demanding overtime when there was none before. Moreover, they are harassing co-workers a lot more lately."

Another worker at Silao, who remained anonymous, told the WSWs: "You raise your hand or say something, and they'll threaten you. They'll switch you to where work is heaviest. One of our co-workers was asked to keep calm and was offered money to stop the 'fuss.' "

Amid total silence by the Mexican press and trade unions, GM workers in Mexico have been using WhatsApp groups and other social media to follow and share the WSWs coverage on the contract fight and strike votes in the United States. Workers' comments to US autoworkers on WSWs articles posted on Facebook include "We are with you," "When are we doing that?" and other similar statements of support.

Cervantes, who is demanding his reinstatement and

has continued meeting with workers to organize against the CTM union, declared: “We are hoping to support people in the US and to get support from there.” His co-worker said separately that a joint struggle with US workers “would be a great strategy.”

Like any other transnational corporation, GM is exploiting its globally integrated production and employing an international strategy to further extract concessions and close plants. GM is trying to speed up production to Silao to continue the flow of massive profits exploited out of workers internationally and directed at filling the coffers of its executives and Wall Street investors.

GM employs 46,000 hourly workers in the US, 10,000 in Canada and 16,000 in Mexico, where it is the largest automaker. The Silao complex is the biggest of the four GM plants in the country and employs about 6,000 workers. It has two “sister plants” that also assemble the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra, at Flint, Michigan, and Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Meanwhile, the Ramón Arizpe and San Luis Potosi plants in Mexico both assemble the Chevrolet Equinox. Their “sister plant” is the CAMI factory at Ontario, Canada. GM fired 600 workers at Ramón Arizpe in March 2018 and eliminated a shift at San Luis Potosi last month. Meanwhile, the company is carrying out frequent shut-downs of production at the CAMI plant.

Only a consciously coordinated international struggle of the working class can successfully advance workers’ interests against a transnational corporation. This must also include auto parts workers, who belong to supply lines that cross borders several times before the final assembly of any car or, for that matter, commodity.

Mexican autoworkers at Silao and other plants are expressing strong opposition to the companies’ speed-ups, both because it is dangerous and exhausting and because they do not want to undercut their class brothers and sisters in the US. But as Mexican workers are increasingly calling for an internationally unified fight, the trade unions and politicians in the US, both Democrat and Republican, are ramping up efforts to scapegoat Mexican and international workers.

Last Wednesday, the president of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Richard Trumka, met with Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador to urge the implementation of the new Mexican labor

reform, which the Trump administration demanded during trade negotiations. Preempting a rebellion against the CTM unions, the law stipulates that unions must be voted by a majority of workers. This is aimed at preventing independent rank-and-file organizations that will orient their struggle to workers internationally, while promoting a section of the same corrupt and nationalist Mexican union bureaucracy aligned with López Obrador’s Morena party and the AFL-CIO.

The entire trade union and political establishments are conspiring with the companies against autoworkers in each country. These are the battle lines in the struggle ahead.

An auto parts worker at Inteva, the 2017 GM-supplier-of-the-year, in the border Mexican city of Matamoros, responded to news about the US strike votes by sending a message to workers through the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. “Everything seems quiet here because the new union along with the old unions are keeping everything under control. But, little by little, they have kept firing personnel and hiring new workers,” he said. “More than anything, what is needed is a lot of courage and to analyze what happened here in Matamoros. Learn from our mistakes about whom to trust and whom not to trust.”

In January and February, more than 70,000 workers at Inteva and other *maquiladora* factories in Matamoros formed rank-and-file committees and organized wildcat strikes in opposition to the transnational corporations and the pro-company CTM unions. They took struggle in their own hands and appealed to workers in the United States, even marching to the border and chanting “Gringos, wake up!”

Any further struggle has since been blocked by a new “independent” union associated with the AFL-CIO and Morena.



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