

# GM shuts down Silao complex in Mexico as workers' rebellion brews

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GM has decided to shutdown production at the Silao complex, its largest in Mexico, because of a growing rebellion at the plant involving workers who are demanding a united fight with their class allies in the US. GM's decision shows that striking workers in the US have support internationally—a huge source of strength which they can unleash only by breaking with the UAW and taking control of the strike themselves.

The 6,000 workers at Silao assemble a vast array of transmissions, engines and more than 400,000 pick-up trucks yearly—the highly profitable GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado. Despite claiming the previous week that GM was “operating normally at all plants,” the company announced on September 26 that two shifts would be laid off from each area at the Silao complex this week. The company then decided Tuesday to shut down the entire plant until further notice. The company will pay some workers 55 percent of their salaries during this period while eliminating paid vacation days from others.

Center for Automotive Research Vice President Kristin Dziczek told AP that “the closing of the Silao plant has created greater pressure on GM to end the strike.”

In other words, a united struggle of Mexican and American autoworkers could mark a serious challenge to the dictatorship of the corporation and the corrupt trade unions. This objective class unity explodes the lie put forward by politicians like billionaire Donald Trump who claim Mexicans are “rapists” and false claims by Trump, the Democrats and UAW that Mexican workers steal American jobs.

GM Mexico said in a press briefing: “We remain vigilant on the negotiations between General Motors Company and the union UAW (United Automobile Workers) in the United States to evaluate day by day our operations, hoping for the GM complex to resume work in the following days.”

The Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which

controls the trade union at the Silao complex, pathetically declared, “As an organization, we prefer this sort of arrangement instead of the firing of workers.” Tereso Medina Ramírez, the regional CTM chief, also took the position of management that “what we hope is that, in the United States, the [auto] companies settle this conflict as soon as possible.”

The statements of the company and the union are attempts to pit workers across borders against each other. That's because all signs suggest that the decision to close Silao was aimed at preempting a simmering rebellion by workers who are already making appeals for a joint struggle with US strikers. Since the strike began, GM has fired at least seven workers who were opposing speedups and overtime in order not to weaken the strike of American workers.

Two-thirds of parts in the cars assembled in Mexico come from the US and Canada, with a significant share going through the distribution centers on strike in the US. Both GM and the UAW have cited a shortage of auto parts as the cause of the decision. However, neither explained the sudden change in calculations to shut down Silao while keeping plants in Ramos Arizpe, San Luis Potosí and Toluca open.

On Wednesday, EFE news agency reported that Silao workers have denounced harassment and unjustified firings “as a consequence of backing US strikers.” The re-hiring of victimized workers, it adds, “is being considered in the demands of strikers in the United States, as well as access [by Mexican workers] to the distribution of economic resources from the [US] strike fund.”

The news agency then indicates that, upon contacting the company, GM Mexico “insisted that it was false that there have been unjustified firings and that the strike fund only applies for the UAW in the United States.”

These statements demonstrate that the company was following closely the activities of the militant group at

Silao taking actions in support of the US strikers when it decided to shut down the plant.

According to workers at Silao in contact with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, GM and its trade union had escalated the harassment and unjustified firings of the more outspoken workers and those with previous injuries to prepare for speed-ups and other measures in response to a potential strike in the United States.

Many of these workers have been targeted for participating in discussions about leaving the pro-company union, which have taken place for years. These workers established a rank-and-file group in April, which kept regular contact on social media and held bi-weekly meetings in a nearby town. After reading about the UAW contract expiration and corruption scandal on the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* in early September, the workers established contact with the WSWS and began joining online conferences organized by the WSWS to discuss with autoworkers in the United States and internationally a joint struggle.

At their local assembly on September 15, the militant group, which had about 35 workers and has since adopted the name “Generating Movement,” voted to actively oppose speed-ups and overtime that GM could use to undermine a strike in the US, which began the following day. After Silao workers communicated this decision during the September 19 international online call organized by the *Autoworker Newsletter* and appealed to US strikers to adopt the demand that GM re-hire co-workers in their militant group, the company began summarily firing specifically those workers present at the September 15 assembly and those who sent voice messages on September 19.

The response by those victimized has been to increase their appeals to their international brothers and sisters. In their statements to the media, the Silao workers have placed front and center that they are waging an international struggle. On Wednesday, Israel Cervantes told *El Otro Enfoque*, “There have already been 25 co-workers fired and we demand, along with co-workers in the United States, their immediate re-hiring.”

A Fiat Chrysler worker in Toledo, Ohio told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that the Silao workers “are sacrificing a lot for the good. The UAW and management use the threat of sending jobs to Mexico as a scare tactic.”

It’s the class duty of all US autoworkers to come to the defense of Silao workers and adopt their re-hiring with full back pay as a strike demand. However, this can only be done by taking the strike out of the straitjacket of the

UAW by forming rank-and-file committees at each plant to formulate their own demands against the concessions demanded by the company and the union, and to fight for these through an international strategy.

At the same time, workers at Silao need to oppose all efforts to channel their struggle behind the CTM or the so-called “independent unions” through arguments that they can be made more democratic due to the new labor reform approved by the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his Movement for National Regeneration (Morena).

The reform eliminates the “exclusivity norm” that companies used to fire workers who left the pro-company union. It allows unions to be formed with a 50 percent vote by at least 30 percent of workers at the plant. However, while claiming that no worker is “forced to belong to a union,” the law upholds the exclusivity that only registered trade unions can reach new agreements with the company.

The new legislation was signed into law on May 1, but workers are still being fired at Silao and across the country for opposing the established unions, demonstrating that its regulations are not aimed against corporate abuses, but at controlling workers. The law, moreover, was demanded in trade negotiations by the administration of Donald Trump.

At a time when the Mexican ruling class and its American and European patrons brace for an economic downturn, they are exploiting widespread popular illusions in López Obrador to tie the hands of workers through their capitalist state and trade unions, at the same time that it militarizes the country in preparation to repress future social upheavals.



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