Opposition builds to pro-company union at GM's Silao, Mexico complex

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29 January 2020

On February 3-6, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) local union at the General Motors Silao Complex, the company's largest factory in Mexico, will hold a union certification vote at the plant. With anger against the CTM reaching a boiling point, the CTM is seeking legal recognition under the country's new labor laws so it can continue its corporatist partnership with GM and impose another pro-company contract on the factory's 6,000 workers.

Since the end of the GM strike in the United States, the company has carried out a virtual reign of terror at the Silao complex, firing militant workers, stripping employees of vacation time and increasing the line speed for GM's highly profitable Silverado and Sierra pickup trucks. This follows GM's termination of at least seven Silao workers for defying demands for mandatory overtime and increased output during the 40-day strike in the US.

"With new performance demands, the line speed is being increased from 76 to 80 units per hour," a veteran worker in the body shop told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. "They are removing area leaders and older workers. And only the supervisors get bonuses of 40,000 to 50,000 pesos [$2,116 to $2,645] for productivity, but we keep receiving the same yearly bonus of 15,000 pesos [$800] they have for the last 20 years. There is much discontent; we are being superexploited," the worker said adding that the local CTM union was colluding with management to impose these oppressive conditions.

The certification vote at the Silao plant is being conducted under the terms of the labor reform laws put in place last May by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his pseudo-left Morena Party. The law, which requires "a free, secret and direct vote" by workers and the approval by at least thirty percent of the employees to certify a union and approve the content of a new labor agreement, will supposedly create "independent unions," instead of corrupt unions, which are paid by the employers.

AMLO's effort to provide the unions with a "democratic" veneer is aimed at curtailing the growing rebellion against the CTM and the "protection agreements," which the union signs with the employers behind the backs of workers. GM and other corporations have long relied on the CTM to violently suppress resistance to these sweetheart contracts that prevent strikes and enforce low wages and sweatshop conditions.

A year ago, however, anger at the CTM erupted into a full-scale revolt with a wave of wildcat strikes by 70,000 *maquiladora* workers in Matamoros who marched to the US border and called on American workers to join their fight. This was followed by the courageous actions of GM workers in Silao, organizing in opposition to the CTM, who have directly appealed to American workers to win their reinstatement.

The new US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, expected to be signed into law by the Trump administration tomorrow, includes requirements for the election of unions by secret ballot and encourages the creation of "independent unions," including those affiliated with US-based unions like the United Steelworkers. Both the US and Mexican governments hope to chain the growing opposition of Mexican workers to a refashioned labor bureaucracy capable of suppressing the class struggle and preserving the competitiveness of Mexico as a cheap labor platform.

There is nothing democratic about the process through which the CTM-affiliated "Miguel Trujillo López" local union at the Silao plant hopes to get legal recognition. The CTM has handpicked an electoral commission of 10 people, reportedly close to the local union bureaucracy, who will select the candidates among those nominated by workers. The commission will oversee the elections. There are no effective measures against the CTM stuffing the ballot or falsifying the results to get reach the 30 percent threshold it needs.

The 18 "representatives" chosen at Silao will be required to undergo "training" by the CTM in order to be present during negotiations for a new contract with GM. What follows has not been disclosed, but presumably the CTM will persuade this body to approve the contract, so the CTM

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can present its case to the federal authorities to obtain a "Certificate of Representation" from the government.

All contracts across Mexico must receive such a certificate by May 1, 2023. But the haste with which GM and the CTM have organized the bogus representation vote at the Silao complex reflects their fear of militant workers who have sought to organize independently of the CTM.

Rank-and-file workers, organized in the "Generating Movement," are exposing the bogus character of the CTM-organized vote. In a flier they are passing out to fellow workers, they ask: "Who decided and when to elect an electoral commission? How will we know who registered [as candidates] and the number of votes obtained, if it's controlled by the electoral commission?" The flier also points out that those elected will only be allowed to "assist" in contract talks and will not be a "negotiating party." It concludes by urging workers to "Organize and fight for your rights."

The Silao workers are right to oppose this sham election. But the fight for genuine workers' democracy and in opposition to poverty wages and sweatshop conditions requires the building of rank-and-file factory committees, which are independent of all factions of trade union bureaucracy and the capitalist state, including the Morena Party and the so-called "independent unions" AMLO and the US government are promoting.

To wage a real struggle in defense of workers' jobs and conditions, these factory committees, controlled democratically by workers themselves, must be based on the fight for the international unity of the working class in opposition to profit demands of the transnational corporations and the global capitalist system. Rank-and-file factory committees must forge direct links with workers in the US, Canada and throughout the world and prepare cross-border struggles in defense of jobs and living standards.

This fight must be conducted in opposition to the phony "internationalism" of the trade union bureaucracies. In Matamoros and Silao, trade unions like the Mexican Electricians Union (SME), its New Workers Central, Los Mineros and the International Confederation of Workers (CIT), which are all tied to Morena and the US AFL-CIO labor federation, have intervened to channel workers behind the guidelines of AMLO's new labor reforms. All of these organizations, along with others like the Federation of Independent Unions in the Auto Industry (FESIIAAAN), and the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), are committed to Morena's program of attracting foreign capital with low wages and so-called labor peace.

Mexican workers earn less now, in real terms, than they did in 2005, according to the Mexican government's National Social Development Policy Evaluation Council. At last week's summit of oligarchs in Davos, Switzerland, Mexico's economic minister Graciela Márquez Colín acknowledged that, despite recent increases to $6.50 a day, Mexico retains the lowest minimum wage in the world.

This cannot be changed by unions that are subordinated to the "national interest" of the Mexican bourgeoisie and committed to upholding the supposed right of the capitalist owners to profit from the exploitation of the working class. Like the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions in the US and Canada, these organizations can only lead workers into a race to the bottom.

The betrayal by the CTM, the United Auto Workers in the US and Unifor in Canada has allowed General Motors to go on the offensive throughout North America. On January 14, the local paper *Heraldo León* reported that GM notified several truck assembly workers at Silao about the elimination of a night shift and possible layoffs. A worker wrote to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* on January 23, saying, "They switched our shifts at 6-speed transmissions. They eliminated a crew and left only two—one at night from Monday to Thursday and a day one from Tuesday to Friday. And now they want to force us to cover two full days of overtime, practically leaving only Sundays for rest."

GM workers at the Silao plant told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* that the company is imposing overtime on Sundays and holidays paid as normal hours, minimum vacation days scheduled since the beginning of the year, constant harassment by supervisors, speedups, the implementation of the Kronos system to deduct pay for the slightest delays or breaks, 10 or less minutes to eat at the cafeteria, firings for injuries and other abuses.

Similar attacks are being reported by GM workers across the US and Canada, with the closing of assembly plants, 12-hour shifts and firing of veteran workers like Juan Gonzales at the Flint Assembly plant for expressing opposition to the company and the corrupt unions on social media.

That is why the campaign by AMLO and his pseudo-left allies to "reform" the unions and promote "independent unions" must be rejected. Instead, workers must build rank-and-file factory committees independent of the entire trade union apparatus and the state as part of the fight to construct a powerful political movement of the working class based on the principles of socialist internationalism.

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