

Mexican autoworkers appeal to US, Canadian workers for support in closing plants over COVID-19

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Mexican workers at General Motors are responding to the wildcat strikes which forced a shutdown in the US auto industry by appealing to US and Canadian workers for support in closing their own plants to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

During the national strike last fall by 48,000 GM workers in the United States, workers at GM's Silao Complex organized to oppose mandatory overtime and speed-ups that the company sought to use to undermine the effects of the strike north of the border. GM retaliated by firing at least a dozen workers and has retaliated with speed-ups and other abuses. An international defense fund then raised thousands of dollars for the struggle of the fired GM Silao workers for their re-installation.

Even though General Motors, along with Ford and Fiat Chrysler, announced Wednesday that it would shut down production across North America, workers at the GM Silao Complex in Guanajuato have notified the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that they are being ordered to continue working.

The trade unions and the corporate media have completely blacked out news about the wildcat strikes, which spread to several Fiat Chrysler assembly plants in Michigan and Windsor Assembly in Ontario, Canada. These continued a global wildcat strike wave which began at auto plants in Spain and Italy. Workers in Mexico have indicated that the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* has been the only source reporting the strike wave.

The Mexican government of president Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been widely denounced by health officials for its inaction and undertesting. Even so, cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in the

cities of Leon and Irapuato, where most workers at the Silao plant reside.

A worker at the transmissions area in Silao (GRX) said that his team leader read an official document which declared that, even if cases were confirmed in the plant, "the company will only disinfect and use masks, keep distance, and other things." The team leader ripped up the paper in disgust after reading it.

These reports were confirmed yesterday by the Mexican daily *El Economista*, which wrote, "General Motors, the largest automaker in Mexico, announced that its manufacturing operations in Mexico continue normally..."

Workers at the Silao assembly area indicate that management will only provide a "cleaning kit" composed of a spray bottle with chlorinated water and rags, and 10 minutes at the beginning of each shift to clean the workstations. Pregnant workers have been provided sick leaves.

Currently, Audi, Fiat-Chrysler, Ford, Honda and Toyota have announced partial shutdowns of two to ten days at their Mexican plants. Their announcements cited, not the need to halt production until the danger of contagion passes, but "adjustments" to meet disruptions in the supply chain and lower demand. The 3,000 workers at the Honda motorcycle and spare parts factory in El Salto, Jalisco, will continue working, which was confirmed to the *WSWS* by a former employee.

As reported in several articles by the *WSWS*, management at the GM Silao Complex is notorious for giving workers effectively less than ten minutes to eat their meals, not letting workers take bathroom breaks, rejecting requests for sick leaves and arbitrarily firing

workers with medical issues. “It’s sad that being an international corporation, GM gives such scant resources to protect its workers—managers are not coming to work,” noted an assembly worker at the plant.

Referring to the wildcat strikes internationally, she explained: “There are fears here that [workers will] get fired and will lose sustenance for their families.” She agreed about the need for a joint struggle internationally, adding: “I agree because we are not only taking risks as workers. If we get exposed to being infected, we expose our families to the infection.”

“The company doesn’t care about our health,” commented a co-worker. “There is not even hand sanitizer on the eating tables, much less when entering the plant... we are manipulating parts that come from other factories and even other countries, and we are eating with our hands totally dirty.” Moreover, some workers are arriving sick, while the buses they take to the plant are packed with 40 people, she added.

She then made a statement aimed at autoworkers in the US and Canada: “Brothers, I ask for your solidarity through these difficult times globally with this pandemic that threatens all of humanity. At GM Silao, we are completely exposed to contracting the virus since we don’t have the minimum protections.”

“We ask for your support in demanding that the plants in Mexico get shut down through the gravity of this crisis, with full salaries to be able to afford our family expenses. And if someone were to get sick due to such negligence, demand compensation for the worker and their family, since we still don’t know the implications of this illness.

“As a GM worker, I see the trade union as being totally indifferent to this issue, that is why I ask for your collaboration brothers. Please help us, demand that we are listened to about this necessity. I send my complete appreciation in the name of my fellow workers.”

Such international collaboration of the working class is as crucial for Mexican workers as it is for their American and Canadian counterparts to overcome the resistance some of the most powerful transnational corporations, their financial backers and the capitalist states. The automakers are postponing the shutdowns in the US and Canada as much as possible, while keeping some facilities such as parts warehouses open entirely,

and planning to restart manufacturing as soon as their trade union stooges regain control and can prevent further walkouts.

The Mexican government has worked incessantly to minimize the risk facing workers and their families, while reminding corporations that they are only legally required to pay minimum wages during emergency shutdowns. In other words, the government is condemning workers and their families to either the risk of infection or the starvation wage of 123 pesos—\$5 USD per day.

The global pandemic can only be contained and its consequences mitigated if workers organize their collective strength internationally to defeat the policy of malign neglect of the capitalist governments and major corporations, which combines trillions of dollars to the banks and Wall Street with pennies to slow the spread of the virus or treat the infection. This must be done independently of the pro-capitalist and nationalist trade unions, which have worked hand in glove with the companies to keep workers on the job, on the basis of a fight against capitalism, which blocks a coordinated and rational use of society’s resources to fight the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted with particular urgency the need to expand and consolidate this cross-border collaboration of Mexican and American workers through an international network of rank-and-file committees to guarantee workers’ social rights and the protection of their lives, above any consideration of private profit.



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