

AFL-CIO, pseudo-left groups seek to derail opposition of Mexican workers to COVID-19 pandemic

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As the COVID-19 pandemic rages out of control in Mexico, the campaign to force workers back into unsafe workplaces has exposed the subservience of every sector of the Mexican bourgeoisie to US imperialism, including the “left” nationalist president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

Confirmed deaths from COVID-19 are approaching 10,000 as of this writing, and the increase continues to accelerate, while several investigations have found that the real death toll is several times higher. As hospitals begin to collapse, the AMLO government has refused to impinge on the profit-making activities of transnational corporations to protect workers’ lives.

While ordering a gradual re-opening of the entire economy starting on June 1, the president already declared as “essential” the production of cars, electronics, and other nonessential goods. He also gave the green light to the reopening of parts plants which were indispensable for reopening the automotive, aerospace, defense and other industries within the United States over the past two weeks.

Through waves of wildcat strikes and widespread demonstrations across manufacturing *maquiladora* plants, mines, hospitals and other workplaces, as well as in public opinion polls, Mexican workers have demanded the closing of nonessential businesses and the provision of proper protections to essential workers.

The main obstacle to the development of this struggle has been the campaign by the self-proclaimed friends of the working class—AMLO’s Morena party, so-called “democratic” and “independent” unions allied with the American AFL-CIO bureaucracy and their pseudo-left supporters. These forces promote the fatal illusion that workers can achieve their demands through appeals to supposedly “left” sections of the Mexican bourgeoisie and political establishment, which are no less subservient to Wall Street than AMLO’s predecessors.

Over the last several years workers have more openly challenged the long-standing domination of the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), whose leaders, known as *charros*, are bribed by the corporations to suppress worker opposition to poverty wages and sweatshop conditions.

This exploded to the surface with the wave of wildcat strikes in early 2019 involving up to 70,000 workers in the border town of Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas, and the militant actions of GM workers in Silao in support of last year’s GM strike in the US. Most recently maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juárez, Mexicali, Tijuana and nurses and health care workers have protested the lack of protections against exposure to the deadly COVID-19 disease.

Fearing that this movement will develop independently of the unions and become a catalyst for a broader political movement uniting Mexican and American workers against the dictates of the transnational corporations and Mexican capitalists, sections of the trade union bureaucracy allied with AMLO and his Morena Party have sought to contain and strangle this rebellion.

This is consistent with the efforts of the Trump administration and the AFL-CIO union confederation and its Solidarity Center to promote so-called “democratic” and “independent” trade unions as a means to subordinate growing unrest in the working class.

This is happening across Mexico, but there are some prominent examples:

- Morena Senator and leader of Los Mineros trade union Napoléon Gómez Urrutia has taken the lead in meeting with mining, metal and steel corporations to apply the return to work after AMLO declared all mines “essential.” After 44 out of 200 non-unionized workers employed in the state of Guerrero by Equinox Gold during the lockdown contracted the virus, Gómez was compelled to denounce the actions of the company while insisting “the authorities must demand that the companies fulfill the health norms before returning to the activity.” Gómez is a long-standing partner of the AFL-CIO, which has sponsored the training of the Mineros bureaucrats.

- The Independent Union of Volkswagen Workers (SITIAVW) at the company’s Puebla facility has collaborated with the corporation to cover up that the death of worker Ángel Ignacio M. was from COVID-19 after health authorities confirmed it and revealed that some of his family members also tested positive. The union, which has been allied to the AFL-CIO since the early 2000s, has insisted that workers must abide

by the order of the Morena governor in Puebla, Barbosa Huerta, who has given VW the green light to open the plant on June 15.

· At Ciudad Juárez and Matamoros, labor lawyer Susana Prieto and the Political Organization of the People and Workers (OPT), both of whom work with several “independent unions” and the AFL-CIO, organized twin marches on May 18 to demand that plants *and workers* abide by AMLO’s decree to reopen manufacturing on June 1. Prieto also blatantly lied when she told reporters that the government was unaware that other nonessential maquiladoras were already open, insisting that that workers “need to make the president of the Republic see.”

· That evening, the AFL-CIO Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, the OPT and the Morenoite Movement of Socialist Workers (MTS)—which publishes *La Izquierda Diario* and has long promoted Susana Prieto’s operations in Ciudad Juárez and Matamoros—held a joint press conference to present a letter to supposedly “inform” AMLO about the early re-openings, which he officially sanctioned. The letter also encouraged workers to leave their fate in the hands of the capitalist government and the profit-driven corporations, pleading that the plants don’t re-open “until the authorities and corporations guarantee that the workplace is 100 percent free of infections.”

The criminal response to the pandemic by the AMLO government has been no different than that of the fascistic Jair Bolsonaro administration in Brazil. As for the AFL-CIO, its leader, Richard Trumka, sits on President Trump’s corporatist board to reopen the US economy, alongside of billionaires like Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. Far from protecting workers from the ravages of COVID-19, which has already claimed the lives of more than 106,000 people in the US—the largest number in the world—the American unions function as enforcers of Trump’s homicidal policies, prompting workers in the auto, meatpacking and other industries to strike and protest in opposition to the unions.

The pseudo-left and the “democratic” trade unions are all aligning themselves behind the AFL-CIO bureaucrats who are on the payroll of Trump’s State Department. Currently, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which has long operated as a front for the US intelligence agencies, is preparing a new “Global Labor Initiative” to expand and add organizations to its already existing Global Labor Program (GLP). Run directly by the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center since 2010, the GLP has sought to form and strengthen so-called “democratic” and “independent” trade unions in 31 countries. According to their latest financial report for 2018, the Solidarity Center received \$34.4 million in revenue, 92.6 percent of which came from US government awards.

A 2015 program evaluation document states that by establishing “strong and meaningful tripartite relationships,” between corporations, governments and the trade unions, the GLP is “intended to serve USAID’s broader democracy promotion goals.” In plain terms, this means promoting the geo-

political interests of US imperialism all over the world.

Of particular concern is suppressing the opposition of workers in the global supply chain for strategic US industries, including auto and military equipment. The new format under the Global Labor Initiative, according to the grant request, seeks “to account for changes in production and supply chains in order to assist in global organizing efforts and international sectoral campaigns, and to engage strategically with private sector stakeholders.”

The complete subordination of the Mexican ruling class to US imperialism—with billionaires like Carlos Slim who lord over Mexican society also heavily invested in Wall Street—make it unwilling and unable to provide any concessions to improve living standards or—as the pandemic reveals—even protecting the lives of the impoverished masses.

Susana Prieto, an AFL-CIO collaborator who founded one of the “independent” trade unions in Matamoros, publicly thanked the Stalinist Communist Party organizations and the MTS for providing a “socialist” cover for her operations. In the case of the MTS, it has consistently called on workers to appeal and organize within “the trade unions that call themselves democratic,” a term which appears 153 times in their online outlet, *laizquierdadiario.mx*. Among the examples they provide, the most prominent are Los Mineros, the National Union of Workers (UNT)—SITIAVW and several other trade unions founded with AFL-CIO funds— and the New Workers Central (NCT), which has also long collaborated with the AFL-CIO.

The only organization opposing these efforts in Mexico and internationally is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which is calling on workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of all the pro-capitalist and nationalist unions, to organize the struggle against the premature return to work and for appropriate protection for essential workers. Such committees should fight to unite with workers across the border and organize a common struggle against the transnational corporations, which are using the pandemic to accelerate their plans for a restructuring of the global auto industry that will result in a new assault on jobs and living standards.

The capitalist system is producing death, inequality and state repression in every country. The only answer to this is the struggle to unite the working class on the basis of the program of international socialism and the reorganizing of economic and political life based on human need, not private profit.



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