

“For corporations they are only numbers”

Two GM Silao workers in Mexico die on Christmas Eve

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After working 12-hour shifts for days on end, looking forward to some free time with their families during the holidays, autoworkers Miguel F. and Fidel A. at the General Motors factory in Silao, Mexico, died of COVID-19 on Christmas Eve.

The deaths of Miguel F., a maintenance team leader in the stamping area, and Fidel A., a paint shop worker, took place as the corporation and its puppet union of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) cover up a growing outbreak at the plant.

Workers have reported 13 deaths the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* since the Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared the production of new vehicles and their parts as “essential” and allowed GM to re-open its plants in late May.

On social media, relatives and friends described the deceased as “great co-workers” and “great friends” and blamed the corporation for their deaths.

“No one will return my husband,” wrote the wife of Miguel F. “It’s unfortunate that for corporations they are only numbers.”

According to relatives, his mother succumbed to the disease two weeks earlier, and his father died several hours after him.

Moments after Miguel F.’s death, a relative wrote: “My godfather and grandma were taken from me in less than 15 days. They were such good people... It leaves such a huge void to lose two of the people you shared some of the best moments with and seeing my grandpa sick is really tough. One doesn’t know why things happen and why they happen so quickly. I was never able to say goodbye to them. I never knew it would be the last time I saw them.”

Commenting on a publication on Fidel A.’s death, his sister-in-law explained: “In this case, it was the corporation’s fault. The worker got sick while working. And what is worse, even though the corporation knew, they never tested him or took any measure, so his condition worsened, and he exposed the other workers that interacted with him.”

A neighbor and relative wrote: “I always said it was negligence by his workplace since he showed symptoms. Even though he went to the medical service of the company, they forced him to show up to work until he left for the holidays, which is when he died due to how bad his condition got. And it can’t be said that he got sick elsewhere since he only went out to work and was never in any meetings.”

Israel Cervantes, spokesman of Generating Movement, a rank-and-file group at the Silao plant, said to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*: “Workers got infected there, but the corporation claims that they had only a ‘general illness.’ When you wake up at 4 am—or 3:30 am for those who live farther away—reach the plant at 5:45 am and start your shift at 6 am, you go out at 6 pm, the bus leaves at 6:45 pm and you don’t get home until 7:15 or even 7:40 at night, what time is there to go out?”

A co-worker of Fidel A. explained to Cervantes that she started showing coronavirus symptoms the day after the holiday break began. “She took a test and came out positive, going to a private doctor” explained Cervantes, “so she called Fidel since she was worried about him, but he never answered.”

Since her condition continued deteriorating, “she contacted the company, saying she was not feeling well, but they said that she still needed to show up to

work on January 2, and that she should not go to the IMSS [public hospital].” Finally, she decided to go to the IMSS, where she was given a leave permit for a “general illness.”

As others returned to work on Saturday, those at the paint shop reported to the *Autoworker Newsletter* that at least five had COVID-19 symptoms, while the trade union delegates simply decided not to show up.

“Most infected are asymptomatic, and we reported numerous infections since the beginning,” added Cervantes. “The company had the obligation to carry out mass testing to all workers. The Labor Ministry also did nothing despite all our denunciations, with the corporation denying everything.”

On November 5, General Motors reported that its third quarter (July-September) profits had increased from \$2.3 billion to \$4 billion compared to the same period in 2019, a 74 percent jump. Amidst the pandemic, their earnings per share (diluted) also increased 74 percent, while revenue remained equal in both periods.

CEO Mary Barra claimed during the announcement, “Our multilayered approach to COVID-19 safety has proven effective in preventing the spread of disease around all of our facilities.”

Referring to the two profitable models produced at the Silao Complex, she then boasted, “As you know, we have been operating our full-size pickup plants around the clock to meet exceptionally robust demand for the Chevrolet Silverado and the GMC Sierra in the United States and Canada. The fact is we simply can’t build enough.”

This rebound in production has been experienced across export industries in Mexico. Non-oil exports increased 3.3 percent in November compared to last year, including a 1.1 percent increase in auto exports to the United States.

Meanwhile, as late as October, according to the latest poll by the Universidad Iberoamericana and UNICEF, 42 percent of households say that they have lost 30 percent or more of their income during the pandemic. Only 11 percent reported receiving any COVID-19 aid, which has been virtually limited to pantries and loans.

While the transnational corporations have quickly surpassed their pre-pandemic production and profit levels, the crisis has entailed mass death and a protracted impoverishment for the working masses.

Yet, the Mexican president López Obrador claimed in his last press conference last year, “The formula has worked, which is why, regarding the *economic-financial issue* triggered by the pandemic, I’m optimistic...[emphasis added]”

The pandemic reveals the class character of López Obrador, his Morena party, the trade unions, and their pseudo-left apologists. They all know the reality in the factories but see workers as replaceable. Their “formula” is that shared by all capitalist governments and institutions: profits come first. All appeals to them that may challenge the workings of the profit system have fallen and will fall on deaf ears.

Workers must take matters into their own hands by joining workers across the world in creating an international network of emergency action committees to carry out emergency measures to prevent more unnecessary deaths. These must include the closure of all nonessential production and full income compensation until all workers have been vaccinated.



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