

Washington and AFL-CIO file labor complaints in Matamoros and Silao, Mexico

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On May 10, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in the United States asked the Biden administration to file the first labor complaint under the United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade deal.

The AFL-CIO document states that the management of the Tridonex auto parts plant in Matamoros, Mexico, has violated the right of its employees to leave the local branch of the corrupt Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and join the Independent National Union of Industry and Service Workers (SNITIS), led by labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas.

The letter notes that Tridonex, a subsidiary of Philadelphia-based Cardone Industries, “fired more than 600 supporters of the independent union SNITIS, which was created after 2019 labor protests forced the *maquiladoras* in Matamoros to raise wages.”

The same week that the AFL-CIO called on the US to intervene in Matamoros, the Biden administration decided to file a separate labor complaint, also under the USMCA. It requested that the Mexican government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) review a fraudulent union recognition vote involving threats and ballot-stuffing by CTM gangsters, known as *charros*, aimed at maintaining the CTM’s control over the contract at the General Motors factory in Silao, in the central state of Guanajuato.

Workers in Mexico should be highly suspicious of these efforts. The same government in Washington is currently backing the massacre of Palestinian workers and children by Israeli bombs and the killing and “disappearing” of hundreds of Colombian workers and youth by that country’s police, who are trained and armed by the United States.

The request by the Biden administration follows an earlier letter signed by US Representatives Dan Kildee, Bill Pascrell and Earl Blumenauer asking GM itself to “speak out against violations of labor and human rights abuses at the Silao GM plant.”

The Canadian trade union Unifor and the so-called IndustriAll Global Union also released letters to GM and Mexican government authorities denouncing the fraudulent vote at Silao.

On May 11, the Mexican Labor Ministry acknowledged that it had found “serious irregularities” in the vote at Silao and would order the CTM affiliate to hold a new vote within 30 days to legitimize its contract with GM. The ministry also filed a complaint with state prosecutors, setting the stage for a possible criminal investigation.

GM said it would hire a firm to conduct an “independent review” of the allegations, but insisted that Labor Ministry inspectors had supervised the vote and conditions at the plant. However, according to workers at the plant who spoke to the WWS, the Labor Ministry inspectors would meet only CTM union officials and workers that had been threatened and/or bribed.

Having ignored numerous previous complaints by GM workers at

Silao, López Obrador himself said last Wednesday that “the US government is right,” adding that “We had confirmed it and it had been condemned.” He then promised to respond to the US request “immediately.”

In a statement pledging to cooperate with the inquiry, the CTM directly addressed the real concerns of the ruling class. “The CTM does not generate conflicts,” it declared, “nor is it an obstacle for the development of industry and trade.”

It remains to be seen whether the AMLO government will assist the CTM and GM in carrying out another fraudulent vote fraud to renew their contract. That would require demonstrating majority support for the contract, with “yes” votes representing at least 30 percent of the total workforce. Alternately, AMLO might allow another registered trade union to negotiate and compete against the CTM for a separate contract.

This validation process is a new requirement for all contracts under AMLO’s “labor reform,” which incorporates the labor provisions of the USMCA. However, in the two years since the “reform” took effect, AMLO has not only given a free hand to the CTM, but has continued, like past governments, to rely on its violent harassment and policing of workers to suppress their struggles.

Moreover, Mexican Labor Minister Luisa Alcalde has insisted that it is acting in “daily coordination with US labor authorities,” and that the 500,000 contracts in the country will most likely not be revalidated before the May 2023 deadline. Nor has the ministry given any sign that it intends to invest in the enforcement resources required to oversee all these procedures. When asked about the lack of enforcement of the labor reform, AMLO has simply said that he will not interfere in “internal” union affairs.

Far from the dawn of “union democracy” in Mexico, or the crusade against CTM corruption that AMLO promised, the USMCA and his government’s labor “reform” program are aimed at extinguishing the fires of socialist internationalism wherever they erupt among Mexican workers influenced by the *World Socialist Web Site*. In addition to belonging to the one-million-strong auto workforce in Mexico, what the workers at Tridonex and Matamoros have in common is precisely their connection to the WWS.

The labor reform was rushed into law in May 2019 after tens of thousands of *maquiladora* workers organized wildcat strikes in opposition to the CTM. As analyzed by the WWS in articles widely shared by Matamoros workers, Susana Prieto worked with US-aligned “independent unions” to sideline the democratic strike committees and mass assemblies set up by the workers themselves. During a mass march to the nearby US border at Brownsville, Texas, the Matamoros strikers called on American workers to join their struggle and made

numerous appeals to workers internationally, through the WSWs.

After initially insisting that workers had to rely on the hated CTM union locals at Tridonex and other plants, Prieto and the Electricians Union (SME)—both long-time collaborators of the AFL-CIO—formed the SNITIS “independent” union to channel and suppress the ongoing unrest.

With billions of dollars in auto parts, electronics and defense products on the line in Matamoros, Prieto subsequently worked to contain new waves of wildcat strikes in 2020 by workers demanding shutdowns with full compensation when workers began falling ill with COVID-19. Prieto and SNITIS subordinated this struggle to AMLO’s May 2020 decrees declaring all manufacturing to be “essential.”

Then, in January 2021, SNITIS called on Matamoros plants to strike for a 15 percent wage increase. No plant won the full increase and dozens of workers were fired.

Thousands more workers have been fired in reprisals for the strikes in 2019 and 2020. SNITIS, however, has refused to organize any struggle against the layoffs and firings. Instead, Prieto used the 2021 strikes as a stunt to announce her entry as a candidate of AMLO’s Morena party in congressional elections to be held next month.

A worker at the sugar processing factory Batory, who remained anonymous for fear of reprisal, told the WSWs that a group of workers fired in January sought help from Prieto, “and she told them that they knew what they were getting into and refused to help them.” The worker continued: “Now they are sad and regret having listened to her. The activist Susana Prieto ended up being more *charra* than the [CTM] *charros*.”

At the GM plant in Silao, a group of rank-and-file workers called the Generating Movement, who had been fighting for years to rid themselves of the CTM, joined online calls organized by the WSWs with American autoworkers ahead of and during the September 2019 strike at GM in the United States. The Generating Movement workers acted courageously and in a principled manner to support the GM strikers in the US by refusing to go along with demands by GM at Silao for speedup and mandatory overtime. The company retaliated by carrying out numerous firings.

Since this brave intervention, the AFL-CIO, the SME and other unions have sought to pressure the Generating Movement into organizing within one of the “independent” unions vetted by the Mexican government and sponsored by US imperialism.

In sum, the Mexican and US authorities, with the help of pseudo-left outfits, are employing the prospect of replacing the CTM goons by “independent” *charros* sponsored by Washington to head off the struggle of workers to unite with their class brothers and sisters to the north and oppose capitalist exploitation.

Within the United States, the complaints over union votes in Mexico coincide with an ongoing campaign by the Biden administration to prop up the existing trade unions, most recently by officially backing the unionization drive of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at Amazon’s Bessemer, Alabama, plant. Less than 13 percent voted for the union.

This expression of opposition to the pro-corporate unions in the US coincides with the sentiments of workers at the Silao plant, who have voted by similar percentages to reject the CTM.

For his part, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in a statement: “The USMCA requires Mexico to end the reign of protection unions and their corrupt deals with employers.” As Trumka himself well knows, if such a policy were enforced in the US, the AFL-CIO would be dissolved. As he was issuing this statement, a federal

judge was sentencing Dennis Williams, former president of the United Auto Workers, to 21 months in jail for having stolen millions in union dues.

Just as workers in Mexico face corruption, sellout contracts and harassment and violence by CTM *charro* officials, American workers confront similar conditions at the hands of the unions in the US. Nor is it any different for workers around the world.

Promoting the myth being advanced around the USMCA labor provisions and Mexico’s “labor reform,” the *New York Times* wrote: “The trade deal seeks to improve labor conditions and pay for workers in Mexico, which proponents say would benefit American workers by deterring factory owners from moving their operations to Mexico from the United States in search of cheaper labor.”

This narrative, while professing concern for workers, is based on the same reactionary and nationalist claims used by the AFL-CIO to divide American workers from their class brothers and sisters across the border, blaming Mexican workers for taking “American jobs.” American workers, according to this narrative, must accept endless concessions in wages, pensions, health care and working conditions to prevent jobs from going abroad.

By pitting workers against each other, the capitalist rulers have been able to slash real wages for workers on both sides of the border over the past four decades, as the *maquiladoras* in Mexico grew dramatically.

Within the US, the Democratic Party is seeking to breathe new life into the rotten corpse of the AFL-CIO, which is entirely integrated into the state. Its foreign policy arm, the Solidarity Center, receives 96 percent of its funding from the State Department. Biden’s point person for International Labor Affairs is Thea Lee, who was deputy chief of staff of the AFL-CIO between 1997 and 2017.

The strategy of the US foreign policy establishment to promote “independent” unions in Mexico dates back to 1997, when these unions first organized within the National Workers Union (UNT). A few weeks after its foundation, the UNT and Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo hosted the first trip of an AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, to Mexico, with the aim of changing “the fossilized labor system,” as reported at the time by the *New York Times*.

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls on workers to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to consciously break from the nationalist and pro-capitalist framework of the trade unions and unify their struggles internationally on the basis the perspective of world socialist revolution.



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