

Morenoites aid Washington's "democratic union" operation in Mexico

Andrea Lobo
14 June 2021

In her visit last week to Mexico, US Vice President Kamala Harris took time out from her anti-immigrant agenda to call upon Mexican officials and trade unionists "to fight for democratic unions." While in Mexico City, she pledged \$130 million in US assistance for this cause: more than the entire \$116.6 million Mexican foreign aid package requested by the White House for 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated levels of exploitation and inequality in Mexico that had already triggered mass social unrest, including the protests against the Ayotzinapa student killings in 2014, the *Gasolinazo* in 2017 and the Matamoros wildcat strikes in 2019. On the other hand, the letters issued by the White House, the Pentagon and the American Chamber of Commerce demanding that Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) reopen factories during the pandemic illustrated the strategic importance for US imperialism of preventing any disruption to the lucrative and vital supply chains linking Mexico and the United States.

Washington has mounted its "democratic union" crusade to this end, working through the corporatist apparatus of the AFL-CIO and its state-funded Solidarity Center. Playing an indispensable role in providing a "left" cover for this US imperialist operation has been the Morenoite group in Mexico and its publication *La Izquierda Diario*.

Washington sees as the greatest danger among Mexican workers entering the class struggle the growing influence of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*. Its revolutionary program gives conscious expression to workers' aspirations to mount a joint struggle across the US-Mexican border to oppose powerful transnational corporations and banks, and the trade union and state structures they control.

In its first formal complaint under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden demonstrated this by targeting the General Motors factory in Silao, Mexico, where a group of militant workers joined calls hosted by the WSWs with American autoworkers in anticipation of a US-wide strike at General Motors. Before and during the strike, which began in September 2019, the Silao workers bravely opposed forced overtime and speed-ups that sought to undermine the US strike. The Biden complaint opposes a fraudulent contract ratification vote at the plant by the company union affiliated to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), presumably to allow an "independent union" to compete for the contract.

The AFL-CIO union bureaucracy in the United States argued that the first USMCA complaint should have been over a similar conflict at the Tridonex auto parts plant in Matamoros, where the WSWs has also gained significant influence. In this city bordering Brownsville, Texas, more than 70,000 workers organized wildcat strikes, mass assemblies and rank-and-file committees in a rebellion against the CTM in 2019 and made frequent appeals through the WSWs for American workers to join their struggle.

By sponsoring so-called "democratic and independent unions" and

lobbying for new union voting requirements under the USMCA, the US ruling class is taking a well-trodden path with the AFL-CIO.

Throughout the Cold War, the AFL and later AFL-CIO were deployed internationally with US taxpayer money to set up pro-US "democratic unions" and purge the existing organizations of left-leaning workers and union leaders. The AFL-CIO and its CIA-linked Latin American front, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), together with their local labor assets, participated in CIA-orchestrated coups in Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, Chile in 1973, El Salvador in 1979, among others. This "democratic union" operation helped the resulting military dictatorships consolidate their power, murdering, imprisoning, torturing and forcing into exile a generation of radicalized and socialist-minded workers and youth across the region.

US labor operations in Mexico: from the CTM to "democratic unions"

Within Mexico, the US union bureaucracy played a similar role in the development of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), a servile tool of US corporations, which is widely hated by Mexican workers.

The founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the virulent anti-socialist Samuel Gompers, sought to rein in the unions that emerged during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). He established a close relationship with the right-wing founder of the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM), Luis Morones, with the aim of consolidating the CROM's anti-communist and pro-US stance in the context of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

After World War II, a similar relationship was established between the AFL-CIO and the CTM. As reported in a 1998 study by Ralph Armbruster from UC Riverside, during the 1940s and 1950s, as the Mexican military was crushing strikes by railroad, electrical, mining and petroleum workers, "The PRI [the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party] and the CTM also purged leftists and communist labor leaders and installed new pro-government labor leaders, or *charros*, in these unions. The AFL, the CIO, and AIFLD'S predecessor, the Inter-American Federation of Labor (ORIT), supported these policies and worked closely with the CTM during this period."

After decades of supporting the CTM, the American ruling class began fearing that a rebellion against it could spiral out of control. In 1998, the Bill Clinton administration organized the first visit ever to Mexico by an AFL-CIO president to meet with unions that had recently left the CTM to form the National Workers Union (UNT).

Official policy in Washington shifted to supporting so-called "democratic and independent unions" in Mexico to play the same role previously fulfilled by the CTM. Speaking in support of a grant for the

AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center in Mexico in 2010, Susan G. Reichle of USAID explained that the US sought to promote a "culture of compromise" between the Mexican unions and "employer organizations," even when "the need for international competitiveness has a downward push on compensation [and] there is a greater likelihood that workers will contribute to broader manifestations of political unrest."

During 2020, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a US agency founded in 1983 to carry out the kind of US meddling in the internal affairs of other countries previously left to the CIA, disbursed \$858,000 for the Solidarity Center in Mexico to "build independent, representative organizations including a national coalition, for improved labor rights compliance."

However, after two decades of upholding pro-corporate policies, including the homicidal return-to-work drive during the pandemic, the AFL-CIO's "independent" partners in Mexico are already being rapidly discredited. As early as 2010, Reichle complained that "Mexican workers have been slow to trust labor rights actors as they push for greater democracy in the workplace," referring to US-trained activists and officials.

In desperate need for a "left" cover for its Mexican operations, especially to draw workers away from the influence of the WSWS, the pro-imperialist AFL-CIO has found a willing partner in the Socialist Workers Movement (MTS), the Mexican supporters of the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) in Argentina, who publish *La Izquierda Diario*.

This tendency traces its origins to the Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno, who repudiated Trotskyism and left the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to join the Pabloite United Secretariat in 1964. Moreno helped sow illusions in the bourgeois nationalist Juan Domingo Perón and the Peronist union bureaucracy during the mass uprisings between 1968 and 1975, politically disarming the radicalized working masses ahead of the 1976 US-backed military coup and subsequent execution of over 30,000 workers and youth.

The MTS intervenes at Silao GM

On May 20, a week after the Biden administration's USMCA complaint, the Morenoite MTS co-hosted a press conference specifically on the contract vote at Silao GM with the Political Organization of the People and Workers (OPT), which was founded by the Electrician's Union (SME) and has a long record of collaboration with the AFL-CIO. The hosts refused to make any critical statement about Biden's labor complaint, sending the message that Washington is playing a progressive role in the struggle at GM.

On May 12, *Izquierda Diario* wrote that the AFL-CIO's requested complaint in Matamoros had one goal: "to demobilize the working class on both sides of the border on the basis of maintaining illusions in the bourgeois 'transnational' justice." If that is the case, then why is the MTS organizing with the AFL-CIO?

The MTS has invested a large share of its time over the last year in building the so-called National Movement against Labor Precarization and Dismissals. Its founding statement of June 24, 2020 was signed by the MTS, its youth, labor and feminist fronts along with several factions of "independent unions" and the AFL-CIO's Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)—the Latino arm of the American union bureaucracy. Reflecting the alignment of the right-wing politics of the MTS and the objectives of the AFL-CIO, the statement criticized the "old trade union bureaucracy" and directed all struggles behind the appeal to "the trade union centrals that call themselves democratic to take up the demands of precarious workers and carry out effective actions to achieve

them."

Another participant is the Revolutionary Popular Front (FPR), the public face of the Mexican Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), an openly Stalinist party whose popular front politics serve to promote illusions in and unity with sectors of the ruling class which it presents as "democratic" or "progressive."

These efforts have had devastating consequences during the pandemic. On May 18, 2020, the MTS co-hosted another press conference with the AFL-CIO's Labor Council for Latin American Advancement and the OPT. That day had been marked by the Trump administration and the Detroit Big Three to reopen auto plants in the US with the backing of the AFL-CIO. At the online event, a letter was announced calling on the Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) not to reopen factories "until the authorities and corporations guarantee that the workplace is 100 percent free of infections."

Such demands only served to discourage the independent initiative of workers and sow illusions in the AMLO administration and management that ordered them back to work a few weeks later. The organizers shamelessly invited the Silao workers to this rotten event.

The MTS in Matamoros

The MTS intervened in the 2019 wildcat strikes by sending "correspondents" to Matamoros and working in tandem with labor lawyer Susana Prieto, to whom they had offered to "make available" their outlet, *Izquierda Diario*, as early as 2015.

Even as Prieto was asking workers not to leave the CTM and as the WSWS was exposing Prieto's longstanding support for the AFL-CIO and AMLO's ruling Morena party, the MTS provided her with uncritical support.

In one episode, on February 16, two striking workers from AFX Industries who were openly in contact with the United Steelworkers (USW) of the AFL-CIO were hosted by the MTS in Mexico City to speak at the Cultural Center of the STUNAM (Union of Autonomous University of Mexico Workers). This connection to the AFL-CIO provoked so much criticism from other striking workers that even Prieto had to distance herself temporarily from the Morenoites.

The main slogan of the MTS was that strikers should appeal for the support of the trade unions "that call themselves democratic," citing as an example those most closely associated to the AFL-CIO, including the National Union of Workers (UNT), New Workers Central (NCT) and the Miner's Union.

On June 26, when Prieto finally announced the founding of her own "independent" trade union with the support of the Electrician's Union (SME), which leads the NCT, she expressed "special thanks to all the collectives that have participated with us—of course I could not forget the MTS," including for "going to Matamoros" and "intervening in caravans" across the border organized with the SME.

In sum, the MTS helped Prieto and the unions to (1) sideline the rank-and-file committees and mass assemblies where workers were organizing democratically, (2) allow the CTM to maintain control of most contracts in the city, (3) shut down the strike wave under terms acceptable to the companies, and (4) block a fight against the 6,500 firings, blacklistings and other reprisals by the corporations. This purge of militant workers who were drawing internationalist and revolutionary conclusions under the influence of the WSWS was a textbook example of the AFL-CIO's counterrevolutionary operations.

In early April 2020, wildcat strikes again erupted across Matamoros and other border cities as COVID-19 began spreading in the plants. The MTS

directed its appeals to the CTM *charros* to “remain firm” in demanding plant closures with full income compensation, and to the AFL-CIO-backed SNITIS (Sindicato Nacional Independiente de Trabajadores de Industrias y de Servicios) to “issue a call to workers to organize.” The MTS wrote: “The role played by the trade unions is very important for the objective of not having any layoffs during the contingency and to demand the necessary aid for the population.”

Neither the CTM nor the SNITIS “remained firm” or posed any resistance at all once the government authorized the plant reopenings, and thousands of workers who walked out or expressed discontent were fired. Having done its job, the MTS kept quiet about the betrayals of the unions.

Over 300,000 people—according to official figures—have died from COVID-19 in Mexico since mid-May 2020, including 13 at the Silao GM Complex and hundreds in Matamoros. The Morenoites bare a share of the responsibility for allowing the imposition of a policy of social murder.

For Prieto, this long process of betrayals culminated with her running and being elected as a candidate for the federal Congress in June 2021 on the ticket of the ruling Morena party.

The politics of the MTS reflect the social interests of layers of the upper middle class deeply hostile to any independent struggle of the working class that threatens their wealth and privileges. This includes especially those seeking careers in the union bureaucracy and capitalist politics. These elements are attracted to Morenoism, whether they are even aware of its history or not, because its right-wing politics harmonize with their social interests.

The open support of the MTS for the Mexican operations of the AFL-CIO is of particular and sinister importance. The Morenoites have extended their allegiances from bourgeois nationalism in Latin America to directly backing the operations of US imperialism in a region it has raped and sacked through countless invasions, wars, dictatorships and coups.

As the pandemic and deepening crisis of global capitalism make clear, no defense of the lives and livelihoods of the working class is possible within the framework of the capitalist profit system, which the trade unions unswervingly defend. Workers need new and genuinely democratic organizations of struggle.

The ICFI is fighting to assist workers in developing an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and impart to it a revolutionary, internationalist and socialist perspective. We urge workers in Mexico and internationally who agree with this initiative to get involved today.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)