

Responding to WSWS, AFL-CIO official tells Mexican workers that UAW embodies “union democracy”

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In recent weeks, the *World Socialist Web Site* has made appeals on social media groups of Mexican workers, providing information and requesting statements of support for the strike at the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Virginia and the two-month-long strike by Warrior Met coal miners in Alabama.

On June 14, Jeffrey Hermanson, consultant and former Mexico Program Director for the Solidarity Center, a foreign arm of the AFL-CIO funded by the US State Department, intervened against one such appeal by the WSWS requesting statements on the Facebook group of the rank-and-file “Generating Movement” at the General Motors plant in Silao, Mexico.

Responding specifically to the call by the WSWS to support the fight by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC) at the New River Valley plant against “the American *charro* UAW,” Hermanson wrote, in Spanish, “The difference between the UAW, the UMWA, and the *charro* unions in Mexico is immense: the UAW and UMWA value the decisions of workers, even when they disagree with the leaders.”

Then, he characterized the decision of both organizations to “re-start the strikes and re-negotiate” once workers voted down the contracts reached by the unions as “proof of how important union democracy is for improving wages and working conditions.”

The “Generating Movement” group was formed in opposition to the *charro* union affiliated to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). The term *charro* refers to corrupt, gangster-ridden and corporate-and-state-controlled unions. The militant group joined calls organized by the WSWS with American autoworkers and resisted increased production, in order to support the GM strike in the United States in 2019. Since then, the AFL-CIO and the State Department have been working to

direct it behind so-called “independent unions” they have trained and financed.

The claim that the UAW and UMWA are paragons of “union democracy” is designed to sell US-government-backed unions to Mexican workers.

For more than 100 years, the AFL and then AFL-CIO have worked to establish unions across Latin America aligned with the efforts of the CIA, US corporations and Wall Street to secure their hegemony, including through military coups and fascist dictatorships. This included decades working exhaustively to purge the Mexican CTM itself of militant workers and officials demanding greater democracy within the organization.

Hermanson makes his claims about the UAW and UMWA as both a defender of the interests of the corporatist and bureaucratic AFL-CIO apparatus of which he is a part, and as a veteran in the attempt to conceal the reality confronting US workers in order to better promote State Department “democratic unions” abroad.

These claims, however, are thoroughly refuted by just some of the recent statements made by American workers, describing their experience with the UAW and UMWA:

- As Silao workers were being fired by GM for supporting the US strike, the UAW was selling it out by ramming through a contract expanding temporary work with poverty wages and the closing of four facilities. Workers widely denounced the vote as fraudulent, with one commenting on the UAW Facebook page, “I’m quite sure UAW membership DID NOT ratify this contract, in my past 24 years whenever membership votes no it still passes!”

- In an open letter Monday to the UAW that every worker should read, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee at the New River Valley plant wrote: “[Local 2069 president] Matt Blondino says that the strike will

continue until an agreement is ratified. Given that you have told us nothing about what you are proposing that is different from the agreements we have rejected, this seems more a threat against us than the company. You are telling us that we will remain isolated and starved on the picket lines until we accept what we have already rejected.”

- At the Warrior Met strike in Alabama, the UMWA regional vice president, Larry Spencer, and a district representative—both members of the executive board of the Alabama AFL-CIO—violently assaulted podcasters that they mistakenly identified as WSWS reporters, even threatening one with racist language: “I’ll beat your mother f**king brains out, boy!” In response, a striking Warrior Met miner told the WSWS that “Thuggery is all he [Spencer] knows” and added: “I think they are thieves themselves, making six-figure salaries while the rank-and-file gets \$300 a week [in strike pay].”

- Last month, former UAW President Dennis Williams was given a minimum 21-month prison sentence by a federal court as one of 15 individuals charged in an ongoing corruption investigation into the UAW. “Twenty-one months for stealing millions of dollars, stealing from all these locals? He’s getting off light,” a Volvo Truck worker in Virginia told the WSWS, comparing the UAW leaders to “crime bosses back in the day, like Al Capone.”

- Just like the CTM, the UAW has forced workers to keep producing vehicles during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic while helping management cover up outbreaks, resulting in hundreds of cases and deaths across the country. Amid an ongoing outbreak in April, a worker at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant told the WSWS: “The fact that the union has said nothing, refusing to answer calls or emails from its membership, paints a pretty good picture as to their true colors. ... they’re not representing our best interests, our health and safety, and with COVID rampant in the plants, our families’ health and safety as well.” Another Stellantis worker in Indiana stated: “They are playing roulette with our lives. All they want is numbers. The union is almost like management. They don’t care what we think. It is almost like talking to the wall.”

In their anti-democratic activities, their intimate ties to the state, and the billions they have accrued, including through union-management funds and corporate stocks, the UAW and UMWA make the Mexican *charros* look like petty thieves.

Hermanson’s intervention in opposition to the *World Socialist Web Site’s* appeal to Mexican workers for

support for the Volvo strikers in Virginia exposes two things:

First, the AFL-CIO and its misnamed and government-funded Solidarity Center are determined to prevent any unification of Mexican and US workers and to keep them in the dark as much as possible as to the struggles being waged by their class brothers and sisters on the opposite side of the Rio Bravo (Rio Grande).

Second, the AFL-CIO, its local agents and the US government which stands behind them are extremely concerned about the growing influence of the WSWS and growing support for its socialist and internationalist perspective among key sectors of the Mexican working class.

It is no accident that Hermanson’s intervention came just days after US Vice President Kamala Harris’ visit to Mexico City during which she called upon Mexican officials and trade unionists “to fight for democratic unions,” while pledging \$130 million in US assistance for this cause. The US government’s aim is to utilize these unions to police the Mexican working class and prevent their struggles from disrupting the vital supply chains from Mexico to the US auto, arms and other industries.

Workers in Mexico, the United States and every other country are waging one and the same insurgency, not only against transnational corporations and global finance, but also against corporatist unions everywhere that have overseen decades of attacks on their living standards and jobs for the sake of defending capitalist profits.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is fighting to unite these struggles across national borders and to provide them with the necessary, conscious strategy. For this purpose, it has called for the formation of genuinely democratic organizations in every workplace, elected and controlled by workers themselves and their unification under the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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