

Union sabotages GM workers strike vote in Brazil

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On October 14, the Metalworkers Union of São Caetano do Sul, controlled by the federation *Força Sindical*, suppressed the 13-day strike of General Motors workers after a massive vote the same morning in favor of its continuation.

Immediately after the vote, the union addressed the press, declaring to the *Diário do Grande ABC* that “more than 70 percent of the employees are already returning to their activities.” The open sabotage of the GM workers’ strike was on the union’s official website, with its president Aparecido da Silva, nicknamed Cidão, declaring: “Obviously, the union respects the position of the assembly, but the judicial decision should be respected.”

The decision by the Regional Labor Court, imposed by the union’s betrayal, results in workers receiving less than half of the payment of food stamps they demanded; newly-hired workers continuing to be at risk of being fired if they suffer a work-related accident, including COVID-19 infections; and other concessions included in the contract agreed to by the union and GM.

For several weeks, workers had rejected maneuvers by the company and the union, which repeatedly presented them nearly identical versions of the initially rejected contract proposal, which also imposed a wage freeze until 2023.

On Wednesday of last week, the union was alarmed by a unanimous vote rejecting the “latest proposal” from the company, which had already demanded that the Labor Court declare the strike “abusive.” The workers’ vote was for continuing the strike in defiance of the court’s decision.

On Thursday, despite the court’s decision making the strike illegal, the workers showed that they were ready to carry on a fight to recover their wages and benefits eroded by price hikes during the pandemic, as well as to reverse concessions extorted by the company with the help of the union over the last several years.

The workers’ revolt against the union was reported by *Diário do Grande ABC*: “There was booing during the afternoon assembly. At the moment of the vote on the proposal, most of the workers raised their hands in favor of

continuing the strike. After the end of the meeting, there was some brawling and aggression between some autoworkers and the [union] leadership.”

After the morning and afternoon shifts voted in favor of continuing the strike, the union refused to carry out the assembly’s decision, isolated strikers, and called upon workers individually to obey GM’s call to return to the production line.

During the strike, while the workers in São Caetano were threatened by GM, Cidão declared in their meetings that the union would do nothing to protect them from victimizations, recommending an “end of the strike because we don’t want to see workers thrown in the streets.” He also openly advocated for a free pass to strikebreakers, declaring: “We are not going to picket, we are not going to force anyone not to work, we will count on individual comprehension.” After 13 days of these dirty maneuvers, helping GM to intimidate the workers, the union managed to impose the end of the strike.

One worker reported: “We know that people are afraid of losing their jobs. One part of the employees returned to work because of pressure from HR (Human Resources) and from the leadership (supervisors).” Another stated: “The union should have been on our side, but they threw us into the lions’ den.”

Throughout the strike, the union sought to isolate the workers from a unified struggle with the other GM plants in Brazil and internationally, amid widespread cuts in a global auto industry suffering component shortages.

In recent weeks, Stellantis and Volkswagen in Brazil announced layoffs of 1,800 and 1,500 workers, respectively, lasting up to five months. Honda and Renault have opened voluntary dismissal programs. The strike at GM was started after the company unilaterally announced in September that it would postpone the adjustment of salaries until next year.

Workers must draw vital lessons from this experience. Far from being an isolated phenomenon, the role of the union at the São Caetano plant as accomplice of the company is repeated throughout the whole industry.

Unions have long ceased to be organizations defending workers, transformed under the changes of the globalization of production into representatives of management inside the factories, imposing the company's dictates and suppressing any opposition.

In 2019, following the announcement of the closure of the Ford plant in São Bernardo do Campo, also in the ABC region, the ABC Metalworkers Union, affiliated with the CUT federation and for many years a bastion of the Workers Party (PT), worked for months to suppress workers' opposition.

The 42-day strike by Ford workers against the closure of the São Bernardo plant was put down after being kept isolated from the auto workers in the ABC industrial region and the company's other plants in several states, including 20,000 auto parts workers directly affected by the closure.

For months, the union promoted the purchase of the plant by the Caoa Group, conditioned upon the dismissal of two thirds of the employees as a way to "save jobs", and ordered the striking workers to wait for negotiations at home. The reactionary campaign by the union over months, which left it up to company bosses to decide the future of the workers, was completely debunked when the Caoa Group decided not to buy the plant.

Earlier this year, the unions responded to the announcement of Ford's definitive exit from Brazil by keeping the workers' struggles in various states isolated from each other and preparing the best conditions for the company's exit without a fight. In Taubaté, where a workers' vigil was organized to prevent the removal of machines from the plant, the CUT-affiliated Taubaté Metalworkers Union (Sindimetau) organized a religious procession to pray against the closure, while advocating that workers rely on the courts to force the company to stay.

It is estimated that 118,000 jobs have been destroyed with the closure of Ford plants in Brazil.

The workers' struggle cannot be left under the control of the unions or the pseudo-left political parties, which divide workers' struggles, blaming job cuts and plant closures on Brazilian workers' class brothers and sisters in China, the US and Europe.

At a national meeting of union representatives after the announcement of the Ford plant closures, the Socialism and Freedom Party's (PSOL) candidate for mayor of São Paulo in 2021, Guilherme Boulos, declared—standing next to the president of SMABC—"Their project is to make Brazil a farm for China, Europe, the US, only producing soybeans and corn to export abroad."

Boulos' statement echoed that of Brazil's fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro made a few days earlier: "There is competition, Chinese, among others. [Ford] left because in

the business environment if you don't make a profit, you close."

Brazilian workers can defend their jobs and wages only through the unification of their struggles against the capitalist class with that of workers internationally, and not through any compromise with the national bourgeoisies and their profit interests.

Amid a wave of workers' strikes in the United States, the American unions are striving to suppress a movement that is out of their control. The United Auto Workers (UAW) is focused on isolating the strike by 10,000 John Deere workers, who rejected the union's contract, from their fellow workers in the US and around the world.

UAW representatives in Brazil were present at the assembly in São Caetano, assisting the *Força Sindical*-led union in betraying the GM workers' strike. In return, union leaders of the Metalworkers Union of Catalão—where one of the main John Deere factories in Brazil is located—issued a fraudulent video in the name of *Força Sindical* purporting to support the Deere workers' strike in the US.

Two days after *Força Sindical* had sabotaged the strike at GM, the union bureaucrats declared that "if necessary, we will even hold work stoppages here to give more support [to the strike in the US]." The real goal of this campaign is to prevent workers in Brazil and in the United States from uniting in a genuine powerful collaboration against the transnational capitalist corporations that exploit them.

Workers need to organize independently and in opposition to the unions, which have collaborated with corporations for years to cut their jobs, wages, and living conditions. GM workers in São Caetano and throughout Brazil should form rank-and-file committees and coordinate their struggles with workers internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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