

US-backed SINTTIA union wins representation as workers at Silao, Mexico GM plant vote out CTM

Shannon Jones
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In an election closely monitored by the US Biden administration and the American and Canadian trade unions, workers at the giant General Motors assembly plant in Silao, Mexico voted by a wide margin for representation by the SINTTIA union. SINTTIA received 78 percent of the vote, finishing well ahead of three other unions, including the current union, CTM, which garnered just 5 percent.

There are over 6,000 workers at the plant, which builds the Chevrolet Silverado and G.M.C. Sierra pickup trucks. The CTM, aligned with the former ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), has been at the plant since 1995 and is widely hated for its naked collaboration with management. Workers at the plant start out making less than \$9 per day, barely above the minimum wage in Mexico, and pay amounts to about \$23 per day.

While workers' enthusiasm to throw off the CTM is understandable, SINTTIA does not represent a genuine alternative. The fact that it is being actively promoted by the US government and pro-company AFL-CIO and UAW as well as the Canadian Unifor union should be a warning.

The promotion of SINTTIA at the Silao GM plant is part of a broader campaign supported by both the US and Canadian governments and the administration of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to push aside the hated CTM in favor of "independent" unions no less under the firm control of the corporations and the state. In this way, the ruling class seeks to divert the anger and militancy of workers into harmless channels.

The victory of the so-called independent union SINTTIA is being hailed in glowing terms by the American trade union bureaucracy. In a press release just hours after the vote, the United Auto Workers declared, "The UAW congratulates the workers of GM Silao on forming a free, fair and independent SINTTIA union. We commend the Biden Administration and USTR for ensuring a fair election process and we look forward to a new era of free, fair, independent unions in Mexico."

AFL-CIO President Liz Schuler issued a statement declaring, "Workers will advocate for higher wages and improved health and safety standards ... helping to set new standards in the automobile industry. This vote represents a rejection of the past."

The Silao plant has been a center of militant opposition to the low wage economy forced onto the backs of Mexican workers by the American transnationals with the support of the corrupt CTM and Mexico's capitalist political parties. A group of workers in the independent Generating Movement at the plant has been campaigning against the corrupt CTM for years. The group organized support for striking US GM workers in 2019 by refusing speed-up and overtime. Leaders of the movement have faced vicious reprisals from management.

However, GM workers in Silao will sooner rather than later be pitched into conflict with SINTTIA. The pro-company character of this union is indicated by the fact that one of its major promoters, labor lawyer Susana Prieto, was elected last year as a federal representative for the ruling Morena party. In promoting SINTTIA, Prieto has praised the intervention of the US government, the same government that is carrying out the mass detention and deportation of tens of thousands of immigrant workers at the border.

The promotion of SINTTIA by the Biden administration and AFL-CIO and UAW gangsters has nothing to do with concerns over the oppression of Mexican workers. Quite the opposite. The representatives of American big business have been increasingly skeptical of the ability of the CTM to suppress the struggles of the Mexican workers, whose labor is the source of immense profits for Wall Street.

These concerns escalated in the wake of the rebellion in the winter of 2019 by maquiladora workers in Matamoros, Mexico, who organized independent workers' committees and launched a wave of powerful strikes that shook auto parts suppliers and other transnational corporations. Striking Matamoros workers carried banners declaring, "The union

and companies kill the working class.” Significantly, the Matamoros workers reached out to their brothers in the United States, undermining the decades long attempt by the US unions to pit American workers against workers to the south. For her part, Prieto worked with US-aligned “independent unions” to sideline the democratic strike committees and mass assemblies set up by the workers themselves.

The US government effort to promote “independent” unions in Mexico goes hand-in-hand with the Biden administration’s efforts to shore up the official unions in the United States, including the backing of the unionization drive of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at Amazon’s Bessemer, Alabama fulfillment center.

The character of the so-called labor reform in Mexico is also exposed by the fact that it formed part of the negotiations for the reactionary U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement on trade (USMCA), the revised NAFTA.

The kind of “democracy” the American unions are promoting in Silao is shown by the record of both the UAW and the AFL-CIO, as well as Unifor in Canada. For decades, the US unions have functioned as little more than extensions of corporate management, overseeing the destruction of wages, working conditions and jobs.

A federal corruption investigation has resulted in the conviction of two former presidents of the UAW, who pleaded guilty to stealing member dues money to fund lavish lifestyles. Other UAW officials were convicted of accepting bribes from Fiat Chrysler aimed at securing management-friendly contracts that robbed workers of hundreds of millions in wages and benefits.

Last year, strikes erupted at Volvo Trucks and farm equipment maker John Deere after workers voted down a series of pro-company sellouts negotiated by the UAW. Rank-and-file committees initiated by workers with the support of the *World Socialist Web Site* played major roles in both struggles.

For its part, Unifor is notorious for spouting noxious anti-Mexican demagogy, even sponsoring a campaign to boycott vehicles built in Mexico, while doing nothing to defend the jobs of Canadian autoworkers.

The AFL-CIO has been intimately connected with US government subversion plots directed against militant workers globally. This has involved the setting up of pro-capitalist stooge unions and purges of militant and socialist-minded sections of workers. Working through its CIA-linked front, the American Institute for Free Labor Development, the AFL-CIO and its local union stooges in Latin America participated in bloody CIA-orchestrated coups, such as Guatemala (1954), Brazil (1964) and Chile (1973).

The Washington-based American Center for International Labor Solidarity, or Solidarity Center, continues this dark tradition. Heavily funded by the US government, it is part of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which has served historically as a conduit for CIA money. In recent years, the Solidarity Center has been involved in ongoing efforts by the United States to destabilize the government of Venezuela.

In 2020, the NED gave \$858,000 to the Solidarity Center to “build independent, representative organizations including a national coalition, for improved labor rights compliance.” In a meeting with AMLO in June 2021, US Vice President Kamala Harris pledged \$130 million to support state-sponsored “labor reform” in Mexico.

The intervention of the UAW and AFL-CIO in Silao is motivated by a determination to prevent the unification of Mexican and American autoworkers and to keep workers on both sides of the border divided. The union bureaucracy is particularly concerned about the role of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has fought to unite workers in Mexico and across the Americas based on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The WSWS broke the media blackout of the Matamoros strikes and brought word of their heroic struggles to workers in the US and Canada. It campaigned in support of the struggle by Silao workers, who faced victimization by the CTM and management for their courageous support of the GM strike in the US.

Workers need organizations, but these must be genuinely democratic organizations controlled by the workers themselves, not the bureaucratic structures of the pro-capitalist trade unions, wedded to the corporations and the state.

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls on workers to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to mount a global counteroffensive to the mad profit drive of the capitalist class. Workers who agree with this perspective should contact the WSWS.



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