

“Independent” union provides cover for AMLO’s attacks on migrants in Mexico

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Last Saturday, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador visited the international bridge in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, which sits across the border from Brownsville, Texas. He was there to personally oversee the implementation of his agreement with the Biden administration, which includes maintaining over 20,000 Mexican soldiers deployed along the border and receiving tens of thousands of migrants expelled from the US, who are then being detained and deported or sent to southern Mexico.

Surrounded by military helicopters and trucks with marines, soldiers, and police, López Obrador, also known as AMLO, gladly stopped near the customs station for a publicity stunt organized by the SNITIS “independent union.”

Expressing their vile nationalist indifference to the plight of migrants, the SNITIS officials held two massive saint-like pictures of AMLO under the phrase “The poor come first” and declared on social media: “The message he sends to workers is that he will always protect us.”

The officials handed the Mexican president a T-shirt bearing the image of SNITIS founder and lawyer Susana Prieto and a slogan calling for a constitutional amendment reducing the workweek from 48 hours to 40 hours. Prieto, who became a national legislator for López Obrador’s Morena party, has raised this demand among Morena legislators, who have reportedly frozen the initiative. Meanwhile, the government already lets companies freely violate the 48-hour limit and numerous other rights.

On January 21, 2019, shortly after AMLO took power, tens of thousands of auto-parts, electronics and other manufacturing workers marched to the same international bridge to call on US workers to join their struggle against the transnational corporations.

As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time, workers shouted: “Gringos, wake up!” and held signs proclaiming it a historic day for the labor movement.

Days earlier, wildcat strikes had erupted across dozens of maquiladora factories in Matamoros, organized by rank-and-file strike committees and mass assemblies outside the plants and in the town’s central park. They demanded a 100 percent wage increase and the removal of the unions affiliated to the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM).

Soon after, lawyers and officials of so-called “independent unions” associated with Morena and the US AFL-CIO union bureaucracy parachuted into town to contain the movement. Prieto, who had a long history of collaborating with the AFL-CIO and Morena, played the central role in promoting illusions in AMLO and initially allowing the CTM gangsters to regain control and sell out the strikes. Then, she founded the “independent union” SNITIS to win over numerous contracts and dues without significantly changing conditions at the plants.

With Prieto repeatedly attacking the *World Socialist Web Site*, this intervention was particularly driven by concerns about the growing influence of the socialist and internationalist perspective advanced by the WSWS during the strike movement.

Seeing its fears confirmed of a wider rank-and-file rebellion against the CTM in Mexico that could spread internationally, the US government under Donald Trump demanded in trade negotiations that Mexico implement legal provisions to channel anger at the CTM behind new “independent unions.”

Morena then fast-tracked a federal labor reform that came into effect on May 1, 2019, establishing that all labor contracts in the country would expire on May 1, 2023, unless unions renewed them through votes at each workplace.

According to official data, only 17,011 contracts were renewed in time and only about 250 were voted down, out of 139,000 contracts nationwide—until recently, officials had estimated that there were 500,000 formal contracts.

The conditions stipulated in the expired contracts will remain valid, but employers must stop paying automatic dues to the phantom unions that were once used to implement the contracts, in most cases without the knowledge of the workers.

In the last couple of years, a handful of cases were picked up by the corporate media and politicians to proclaim a dawn of “union democracy” in Mexico, where contracts were won by “independent unions” trained and financed by the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center. This organization is almost entirely funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was formed to carry out overtly the kind of political influence operations that the CIA previously oversaw covertly.

While AMLO today denounces Washington’s support for NGOs trying to destabilize his government, his own government has helped cultivate a faction of the Mexican union bureaucracy that is more closely controlled by US imperialism. He welcomed the pledge by US Vice President Kamala Harris in 2021 to spend \$130 million to fund so-called “democratic unions” in Mexico.

The tiny fraction of contracts rejected—and even fewer replaced by new unions—demonstrates that this was a state-run operation mainly targeting ongoing or looming rebellions against the established unions.

Despite massive funding and support from the US government, Morena and its numerous pseudo-left satellites, the failure of these “independent” unions to gain any significant following nationally demonstrates that they are the product not of any revolt from below, but rather of a state and US-backed intervention from above.

The most publicized case took place at the General Motors Silao Complex in central Mexico, where the Solidarity Center used cash payments and lawyers to destroy a rank-and-file group that had organized itself to drive out the CTM union. The US government handpicked a few workers to register and impose an “independent union,” SINTTIA. As soon as it was voted in with a contract including miserable wages, SINTTIA immediately betrayed its promises of defending workers from victimization and numerous abuses by management.

The stunt this weekend by Susana Prieto’s SNITIS union in Matamoros to glorify AMLO as he implements Biden’s orders to attack migrant workers stands alongside the open meetings between the SINTTIA leadership in Silao and US Ambassador Ken Salazar as naked expressions of the nationalist and reactionary character of the “independent” union scheme.

In 2022, unions were compelled to make 516 strike

authorization announcements, mostly as part of the contract renewal processes, but only seven strikes were formally declared and all but one ended quickly.

In the context of rampant inflation, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and US preparations for war against China, AMLO and his union partners in Mexico are fulfilling a fundamental service to US imperialism and its war drive.

On the eve of his trip to Matamoros, AMLO boasted at a press briefing last Friday that Mexico had consolidated its position as Washington’s top trade partner. “The US could not function without us,” he said according to *Jornada*, adding: “Within our territory, there are auto-parts plants that supply the war industry of that country.”

In September 1938, exactly one year before the eruption of World War II, Leon Trotsky summarized US role in Latin America as that of “the gendarme of imperialist foreign exploitation.” Writing from exile in Coyoacán, Mexico, where he would be assassinated by an agent of the Stalinist bureaucracy just two years later, Trotsky stated that US policy “necessarily fuels the revolutionary resistance of the Latin American people, whom it must exploit with growing intensity.”

This assessment retains all of its validity as thousands of troops mass on both sides of the sprawling industrial-commercial belt along the US-Mexico border, and the governments in Washington and Mexico City, along with their agents in the union bureaucracies, attempt to suppress the class struggle. These efforts are creating the conditions for a massive eruption which must be prepared through the building of a new revolutionary internationalist leadership fighting to unite the struggles of workers in Mexico and the US against their common enemy.



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