

Mexican autoworkers kept in the dark on looming US-Canadian auto strike

Andrea Lobo
4 September 2023

More than a week ago, autoworkers at Ford, GM, and Stellantis in the United States and Canada voted overwhelmingly to authorize strikes—97 and 98.6 percent, respectively—ahead of the expiration of their contracts in less than two weeks.

Despite their working at suppliers and sister plants immediately connected to workers in the US and Canada, the union bureaucracy, including the so-called “independent” trade unions backed by the US and Canadian governments, are deliberately keeping the hundreds of thousands of autoworkers in Mexico in the dark about this struggle.

At the Silao General Motors plant in central Mexico, the SINTTIA union has not reported on social media or by any other means on the US-Canada strike votes. For three weeks and even longer in some departments, the Silao Complex, GM’s largest in Mexico, has been shut down presumably over “parts shortages.”

Anger among the rank-and-file is simmering as the union disregards the demands by workers, including fighting for higher pay during stoppages, opposing unjustified layoffs and harassment by management and supervisors, providing protective equipment, improving healthcare services, among others.

A chassis worker at the plant told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The union has kept us in the dark about the strike. They don’t say anything. Meanwhile, all of us are struggling because we need to economize, make miracles, with the 55 percent they are paying us” during the shutdown.

He added, “Those of us in higher tiers, are making very little, and those who have been working for one or two years and don’t make the cap, are making even less. And the union officials are level 5, earning much more and doing no work. Well, they are just fine.”

Messaging groups reflect this growing anger, as reported to the WSWs by a worker who resigned recently over corporate and union harassment. “The work stoppages are really tough, as wages themselves get hit directly. And instead of showing any support, SINTTIA is doing worse than the CTM. The behavior of [secretary general] Alejandra Morales and some union delegates is truly outrageous.”

Industry analysts have reported that corporations have

increased inventory over several months ahead of a possible strike. Daniel Romo, intelligence chief of the firm *Negocios de Directorio Automotriz*, claims that GM, Ford and Stellantis in Mexico “have accumulated enough inventory of cars to mitigate production losses over a prolonged strike and mitigate stress along the chain of suppliers that depend so much on overtime, logistics and other costs.”

However, far from confirming such triumphalism, the alleged parts shortages have forced GM to shut down production of its popular pickup trucks Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra at Silao for almost a month. Its sister plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which produces the same trucks, also stopped work during the entire week starting on August 28. The Oshawa GM plant in Canada, which also produces the Silverado, was down Thursday for a separate parts issue, while GM Wentzville Assembly in Missouri cut its third shift last week.

These shutdowns “will not help GM’s attempts to boost inventory levels whether there is or is not a strike because they all involve pickups, which are in high demand,” reported the *Detroit Free Press*, citing an industry forecaster. In other words, GM will be especially pressed on compensating for lost production of pickups at Silao and other plants outside of the US and Canada in case of a strike.

But instead of organizing a joint struggle of workers across North America to take advantage of this situation and, more generally, to prevent GM, Ford and Stellantis from ramping up production abroad to undermine the effects of a strike, the union bureaucracies are actively seeking to isolate workers from their most powerful allies, their class brothers and sisters internationally.

The case of SINTTIA is emblematic. In September 2019, a group of rank-and-file workers at Silao, who were organizing to drive out the *charros*, the gangster-ridden union of the Mexican Confederation of Workers (CTM) at the GM plant, came in contact with US autoworkers through the WSWs and opposed overtime and speedups as the company sought to undermine the national GM strike in the US.

In response, not only did GM fire the most militant workers in the group, but the AFL-CIO led a well-financed campaign to destroy the militant rank-and-file group by training and funding a supposedly “independent” union, SINTTIA.

GM Silao was in fact the subject of the first labor complaint under the new US, Mexico, Canada trade agreement (USMCA). The Biden administration demanded in May 2021 that the Mexican government intervene to allow free elections for SINTTIA to win the union election at the GM plant. The AFL-CIO, its Solidarity Center—financed by the US government—and Unifor in Canada worked closely with their Mexican partners to establish SINTTIA and support its election in February 2022.

Even as the Biden administration celebrated that it had won “free and democratic conditions” for Silao workers, only a few months later the White House conspired with US Congress to ban a strike by 100,000 railworkers in the US and impose a contract that they had overwhelmingly voted down.

The latest USMCA labor complaint was filed by the Canadian government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to demand that the German-based Fränkische Industrial Pipes stop efforts to block the bid by SINTTIA at its auto-parts plant in Silao. In June 2023, SINTTIA was elected at its second factory and congratulated by Unifor and the United Auto Workers in the US.

The following month, the Trudeau government autocratically shut down a strike by West Coast dockworkers and imposed a sellout contract, with the prime minister declaring that workers’ opposition was “unacceptable.”

There is a direct connection between the US and Canadian governments’ strikebreaking and their support for SINTTIA and other so-called independent unions in Mexico. Both domestically and internationally, the imperialist oligarchs represented by Biden and Trudeau rely on the trade union bureaucracies to suppress any resistance from the working class to their corporate and foreign policy aims.

Above all, the USMCA was aimed at consolidating the North American economic platform to wage war against China, which is seen by US geopolitical strategists as the main threat to the US drive for global hegemony. Key provisions increased the percentage of vehicles and other products that must be assembled within the three countries.

The USMCA, backed by Republicans and Democrats alike in the US, also demanded a labor reform in Mexico instituting elections at workplaces to legitimize the trade unions. The main motive was to channel an imminent rebellion against the hated CTM unions behind “independent” apparatuses trained and financed mainly by the US, Canadian and German governments and modeled after the venal bureaucracies in those countries.

A massive wave of wildcat strikes involving tens of thousands of auto-parts, electronics and other workers erupted in January 2019 in the city of Matamoros. Workers demanded a 100 percent wage increase and the removal of the CTM unions. After workers organized rank-and-file strike committees, staged mass assemblies, made frequent appeals through the WSWs and even marched to the US-Mexico border to get American workers to join them, the Mexican government and AFL-CIO deployed their “independent” union allies to suppress and

betray the rebellion.

Today, the “independent” union created in Matamoros, the SNITIS, has similarly kept quiet about the looming strike of US and Canadian autoworkers. Its founder Susana Prieto Terrazas, now a legislator of the ruling Morena party, has not only avoided mentioning the struggle in the US and Canada but actively sought to argue that Mexican workers have little in common with their brothers north of the border. “The gringos,” she said at a recent press conference, “work 40 hours from Monday to Friday, and 48 hours sometimes but at a maximum. In other words, the other eight hours are paid as overtime.”

This is a blatant lie. Whether it is the 10 and even 12-hour days as the new normal, the loss of buying power to inflation, the tier systems, job security, the unsafe conditions and lack of vacation time, workers all over the world face the same onslaught by international capital.

The Biden and Trudeau administrations have also pumped billions of dollars into corporate coffers to build electric vehicles domestically as part of the geopolitical imperative to dominate the market and subdue China. As detailed by a recent statement by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, EVs require only a fraction of the number of labor hours and, if the auto companies have their way, will entail the destruction of hundreds of thousands of assembly and parts jobs globally.

For his part, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who represents the Mexican billionaires and multimillionaires eager to profit as junior partners of the corporations “nearshoring” production, has faithfully aligned himself behind the anti-China campaign and pro-corporate EV transition.

The developments since the 2019 Matamoros strikes and the struggle by Silao workers have confirmed the warnings made at the time by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the promotion of supposedly independent unions by imperialism and the Mexican government was aimed at preventing the widespread internationalist sentiments and the independent initiative among workers from finding an organized and politically conscious expression.

Workers across Mexico must see the contract battle in the US and Canada as their own battle against super-exploitation, corporate despotism, the EV jobs bloodbath, and war. This struggle must be waged against all nationalist and pro-capitalist union bureaucracies by forming rank-and-file committees at each plant under the leadership of the International Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Contact us today to take up this struggle.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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