

Unions celebrate suppression of GM strike in Brazil

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Seventeen days after the announcement of more than 1,200 layoffs at three General Motors plants in the state of São Paulo, the unions announced on Wednesday the end of the strike that had mobilized the company's 11,500 workers. After declaring a "victory" for the workers, the union bureaucrats are preparing to impose the cuts demanded by the company.

In compliance with a court decision, GM has declared that it will begin "internal procedures" to reinstate the dismissed workers. This supposed 180-degree turn by the company after a campaign since September to force the mass firings was viewed with enormous suspicion by the workers. On Monday, they voted to continue the strike until their jobs are secured.

The union bureaucracy was able to suppress the strike using a combination of lies, collusion with the state and efforts to keep the movement isolated. However, the workers continue to be pushed into a direct confrontation with GM and, consequently, with the unions and the courts.

Tensions at the Brazilian plants remain high, with management having made it clear last week that they will not accept a return to conditions before the strike, let alone the continued jobs of reinstated workers for long.

On Tuesday, the day before the end of the strike, the president of the São Caetano do Sul Metalworkers' Union, Aparecido da Silva (Cidão), admitted that "the company remains inflexible in its position on the payment of the days off work, and also with regard to other issues pertaining to day-to-day life." He concluded: "We can't go back empty-handed without an agreement signed by the company."

Among the "other issues" pointed out by Cidão that remain unresolved to this day is the guarantee of the jobs that were cut. During Wednesday's assembly, the São Caetano do Sul union absurdly included among the justifications for ending the strike a court decision on job stability that hadn't even been made. A note on the organization's website stated: "Job stability at the São Caetano do Sul unit is dependent on a court ruling in relation to the layoffs, which are specific demands of workers in São

José dos Campos and Mogi das Cruzes." Other points, such as payment for days of work stoppages, are being highlighted to cover up the fundamental issue of jobs.

In reality, the agreement with GM puts the decision on jobs in the hands of the courts while workers remain without any guarantees against a new round of cuts, which could come soon.

CSP-Conlutas, controlled by the Morenoites of the Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), which runs the São José dos Campos Metalworkers Union (SMSJC), has played a central role in diverting and suppressing the workers' opposition.

Just like the openly right-wing bureaucrats of the São Caetano union, controlled by Força Sindical, the pseudo-leftist PSTU unionists effusively celebrated the court decisions that temporarily froze the layoffs in order to disorient the workers. "The retaking of jobs is a historic victory, the fruit of the powerful struggle of the workers of the three cities," declared SMSJC leader Valmir Mariano.

After burying the strike movement, *Opinião Socialista*, the PSTU newspaper, published the headline: "With jobs and days off guaranteed, General Motors metalworkers suspend strike."

Throughout the strike, the Morenoites tried to fraudulently present themselves as advocates of a unified struggle of GM workers, not only in Brazil, but also internationally. In a march in São José dos Campos, Vera Lúcia, a former PSTU presidential candidate, mentioned the autoworkers' strike in the United States, saying: "We will have this unified struggle internationally because the struggle of the comrades in the US is the same as the struggle of the comrades here."

What the Morenoites failed to mention is that, just like in Brazil, the autoworkers in the United States are fighting a battle on two fronts: against GM and the other automakers, on the one hand, and against the corrupt union bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which works in unity with the administration of Democrat Joe Biden to undermine the explosive workers movement.

Since mid-September, the union in the US systematically

sabotaged the strike approved by 97 percent of the workers at GM, Ford and Stellantis. Instead of an effective strike, the new UAW president, Shawn Fain, has promoted a new model of “stand up strike,” in which only a few units were paralyzed and the vast majority of workers continued to produce cars and generate profits for the billion-dollar companies.

Recently, GM and Ford workers in the US have rejected the contract promoted by Fain as a “historic victory” at multiple plants. In reality, just like the agreement reached by the unions in Brazil, the contract defended by the UAW paves the way for the companies to impose the massive job cuts contained in their project to transition to the production of electric vehicles.

The reality of the attacks imposed by GM with the help of the UAW in the United States was described by a worker interviewed this week by the WSWs: “They’re trying to sell [this proposal] to the temporary workers but there are so many loopholes in the contract that will let the company lay them off before they are converted to full-time.”

The PSTU’s omission of the historic betrayal being promoted by the UAW, which consciously acts as a defender of the interests of the US imperialist bourgeoisie, was not accidental. On the contrary, they actively participated in this plot against the Brazilian and US workers.

In mid-October, on the eve of the strike at GM Brazil, CSP-Conlutas leaders went on a tour of the US at the invitation of the UAW, which was facing a particularly critical moment. The rebellion of rank-and-file workers against the bureaucracy was reaching a turning point, shortly after workers at Volvo-Mack Trucks, organized in the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee, rejected a treasonous union contract proposal.

Giving their support to the efforts of Fain and the UAW to repress the rank-and-file opposition movement, the Conlutas delegation, including the aforementioned Valmir Mariano and two other SMSJC leaders, visited “more than 15 picket lines and stressed to the US workers the importance of the support of the metalworkers of São José and the region for the movement.” Returning to Brazil, they assured the workers of São José dos Campos: “The UAW union is under the command of a new leadership, which has a more combative perspective.”

Reproducing the UAW’s efforts to subordinate American workers to the Biden administration, the PSTU acted from the beginning to subordinate the strike against the layoffs at GM to the Workers Party (PT) and the Brazilian state, presenting them as defenders of workers and opposed to the interests of the transnational corporations.

The bankrupt nationalism of the Morenoite-led union was clearly shown in a campaign by the CSP-Conlutas to identify

the interests of the workers of the Avibras arms company with “national defense” and connect their struggle to the PSTU’s calls to arm Ukrainian forces in the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, which threatens to escalate into a direct confrontation between nuclear powers.

Vera Lúcia exposed her party’s reactionary program in directing the GM workers to appeal to the bourgeois governments, declaring that “The state government and the federal government have a direct responsibility to reverse the layoffs of all workers, and to guarantee a reduction in work without a reduction in wages.”

CSP-Conlutas union officials in the São José dos Campos and Region Metalworkers’ Union and PSTU politicians have sought to falsely present themselves in recent years as an “opposition” union, but their real role has been to work to keep GM workers isolated and guarantee the company’s interests.

The cuts demanded in recent years were pushed through with the help of the unions even during the worst moments of the pandemic, and continue today with the justification of a lack of auto parts, declining sales and the need to pay for the transition to electric vehicle production. At the same time, the enrichment of a thin layer of corporate executives and investors has continued unabated.

While the trade union bureaucracies in Brazil, the United States and around the world are allied in fighting to maintain their privileges, guaranteed by big business in exchange for their services in suppressing workers’ opposition, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting for a global strategy to combat transnational corporations based on the political independence and the genuine international unity of the working class in struggle.

In the coming period, GM and other automakers will relentlessly advance their plans to destroy jobs. Brazilian workers need to respond urgently by creating rank-and-file committees in all factories in unity with the IWA-RFC.



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