

Workers denounce fraudulent election by US-sponsored union at General Motors in Mexico

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Autoworkers at the General Motors assembly plant in Silao, central Mexico, have denounced an election called by the so-called Independent Union of Auto Industry Workers (SINTTIA), telling the *World Socialist Web Site* that it has been used to provide a “democratic” cover to facilitate imposing a planned sellout contract.

For two years, since becoming the first union to employ the country’s new Labor Reform to replace the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) union, SINTTIA had maintained the same unelected leadership while enforcing company mandates just like the CTM had done for 25 years.

Workers at the plant realized that nothing had changed. “The union is in favor of the company and does nothing for the worker,” as an assembly worker explained to the *World Socialist Web Site* shortly before the election.

Moreover, the exposure by the WSWWS showing that the leadership had been hand picked and trained by the Solidarity Center—the government-financed international arm of the AFL-CIO—has become widely accepted among workers.

The Solidarity Center intervened with cash and lawyers to destroy an existing anti-CTM group of rank-and-file workers called the “Generating Movement” by training a few of these workers as pro-corporate union officials and using them to register SINTTIA. Some of the former leaders of Generating Movement who were sidelined by SINTTIA were fired for refusing speed-ups in order to support the 2019 US national strike at GM.

In response to growing opposition, the union apparatus decided bureaucratically that it was time to enforce its own statutes by convening its second public assembly on December 17 and holding the election of leadership bodies on February 1 and 2.

One of the four active workers elected to the Electoral Commission at this assembly approached the *World Socialist Web Site* to expose the entire affair as an attempt to limit the election to factions within the same leadership, while steps were taken to secure the re-election of the slate led by current general secretary, Alejandra Morales Reynoso.

Moreover, the worker, who asked to remain anonymous, said the process was ultimately “directed” by Héctor de la Cueva and his Center for Labor Research and Consulting (CILAS), the same firm of lawyers tied to the Solidarity Center that established SINTTIA.

“To begin with, the electoral commission was elected in an assembly without a quorum, where only 300 people participated,” the worker said, pointing to a union rule that at least a third of members must be present for decisions to be valid.

The two assemblies so far were “planned so that there are few people,” the worker explained. “They do not provide transportation. They choose a place that does not even hold a thousand people. They do it at a time when the night shift, one third of the workers, does not go because they go home to rest. It’s a small crowd, it’s mainly supporters. When there is criticism, they heckle you.”

Besides the election of four active workers for the Electoral Commission

to oversee the February vote, the “pseudo-assembly voted on a list of demands” for the next contract that had been pre-determined by the leadership, the worker said. “A measly 15 percent increase is proposed, but it will never even happen. It will be half or less. And there are few modifications to the existing contract.”

The only new demands in the document consist of a couple of extra holidays, a \$30 bonus for school supplies, a couple of special bonuses for high seniority workers and team leaders, and an increase from 55 percent to 65 percent of wages paid during technical work stoppages (when SINTTIA had promised workers to fight for 75 percent).

Even with a 15 percent wage increase, pay will be divided in 13 tiers from 318 to 932 pesos (US\$19-55) per day at GM Silao, where workers assembled about 840 pickup trucks per day last year, which sell at around \$50,000 each, as well as engines and transmissions.

General Motors, which posted \$10 billion in profits last year, pays the entire Silao workforce the equivalent of four or five trucks daily in wages.

At the December 17 assembly, a deadline of January 7 was announced for inscribing full slates to compete in the election—in the middle of the holidays. Then, only three slates led by existing secretaries of the union were accepted.

“We will never be on the road to true union democracy in this way,” the worker said, indicating that all slates are ultimately “advised by CILAS.”

He added, “Alejandra’s slate was incomplete because it did not include candidates for the Honor and Justice Commission. Not all the members had the right to participate to register a slate, only those of a list that Alejandra suggested of 1,800.” Moreover, “She also modified the statutes in order to be reelected.”

An audio recording of a meeting of the Electoral Commission shows that its members felt that they were deliberately kept ignorant of the rules, including those against officials being re-elected. “Had we known,” one said, “neither of the three [slates] could have competed,” to which others seemed to agree. The member who spoke to the WSWWS said that two were clearly pro-Morales.

Many workers at GM Silao went on social media to protest that they were not allowed to vote despite paying dues or that they did not even know about the election. Some criticize the participation in the election of auto parts suppliers Draxton and Fränkische, despite joining SINTTIA less than one year ago, and that Morales is better known among those workers.

On February 3, the union announced the results. Only 3,700 workers from the three companies voted, with 1,662 for the Pink-Black slate led by Morales, followed by 1,611 votes for the Blue slate of Secretary of Labor and Conflict Antonio Castro and 370 votes for the Red slate.

This is far less than half of the 9,000 workers at the three companies and much fewer than the 5,875 workers who participated in the vote limited to GM Silao which ousted the CTM in August 2021.

The member of the Electoral Commission explained, “There were

irregularities in the voter list as it was not the most current in the Federal Labor Board. In addition, the numbers at Draxton and Fränkische were inflated. There is no record of federal monitors at these companies on the voting days.”

Audio recordings shared with the WSWS demonstrate that Héctor de la Cueva of CILAS directed the Electoral Commission to print only 7,000 ballots and to accept whatever voter list was provided by Morales. In another recording, Morales can be heard ordering the commission to announce, “That is the list and only those on it have the right to vote, because it is legally [registered] with the Labor Board, and even if the others comply with the requirements of being unionized, they will not be allowed to vote by decision of the Electoral Commission.”

The Blue slate has presented challenges to the results to both the Federal Labor Board and the US government, while insisting that GM cannot force its officials to leave their comfortable office positions and perks until there is a response.

What is most striking about the three slates is that none of them proposed any changes to the list of demands for the 2024-26 contract that was dictated from above in December. The document with “demands” endorses the four-day, 12-hour weeks and explicitly says that management should be allowed to modify workweeks, impose “discontinuous and special shifts,” move workers from areas and carry out firings as it pleases.

In other words, the interests of workers were not on the ballot. The election was limited to which faction of the bureaucracy gets to continue skipping work on the line and profiteering from dues money. The campaign itself was limited to empty slogans.

The worker on the Electoral Commission said, “The labor authorities, which is the Federal Labor Board, accept everything the union does. There is also corruption among the labor authorities, which ignore the fact that they act contrary to the union’s bylaws and to the law itself.”

An active GM worker in the transmissions area told the WSWS that “there was nothing democratic” about the election, and drew some broader conclusions:

Alejandra [Morales] already had the list of demands ready. [The election] was a facade because Alejandra already had everything formulated.

Unfortunately, this woman is placing close associates [in office] so that there is no clash with her corruption. She is creating a web of protection for herself and her arbitrariness. They buy them with royalties. It’s sad how they sell out just like the [UAW President Shawn] Fain administration in the US. They do so many things that don’t help the worker.

It does nothing to improve things for five of my people when 3,000 still lack benefits. The policy should be to improve conditions for all.

Referring to the implications for Mexican workers of the recent statements by the UAW and the Biden administration about the transformation of auto plants into war production during World War II, he added:

Powers like the United States debate the wars in the world, they are not interested in how many people are going to die. They are only interested in selling their military equipment and making war. The worker and the rest go down the tube.

When SINTTIA was elected at GM in February 2022, the UAW said: “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.”

Later that year, the UAW organized its first direct election for national leadership positions after a court order. The union bureaucracy failed to update mailing addresses or otherwise inform most workers about the election. As a result only 104,000 of the 1.1 million union members participated. Despite these limitations, rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman received almost 5,000 votes, running on an explicitly socialist platform, calling for the abolition of the union apparatus and building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Lehman was compelled to file a lawsuit against the Department of Labor’s decision to sanction this fraudulent election, which was won by Shawn Fain in a runoff after gaining the votes of only 6 percent of the membership.

In effect, the fraudulent election organized by SINTTIA takes a page out of the playbook of its trainers in the AFL-CIO and UAW, while the labor authorities and courts act with the same indifference to the disenfranchisement of workers.

The Labor Reform in Mexico, which ordered all workplaces to legitimize their contracts with unions through votes, was demanded as a pre-condition by the US and Canadian governments for the new US, Mexico, Canada (USMCA) free trade agreement, which further increased regional integration of supply chains.

The AFL-CIO in the US, its counterpart Unifor in Canada and the German-led IndustriALL had been the protagonists of this “reform” for years before its implementation, lobbying the Mexican government and training supposedly “independent” unions.

Now it has become clear that the US and Canadian ruling elites were concerned not only with developing safe channels for the emerging rebellion against the CTM.

Reinforcing the credibility of the union bureaucracy overseeing the main source of cheap labor for the North American economic platform was crucial to (1) escalating the economic and military conflict against its rivals, chiefly Russia and China, and (2) implementing the greatest restructuring of the auto industry in history toward electric vehicles and automation, which has already entailed mass layoffs globally.

The election at SINTTIA confirms that workers were sold a new pro-corporate bureaucracy to prevent them from organizing truly independent and democratic workers’ organizations.

As demonstrated by the major support received by Will Lehman, it is possible and necessary for workers across North America and internationally to take power out of the hands of the bureaucracies and return it to the shop floor, unifying workers’ struggles internationally by building rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracies. To be successful, this requires a political program and strategy against the capitalist profit system and for socialism.



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