

UAW-backed Mexican union tries to ram through sell-out contract at General Motors

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Anger is building up against the so-called “independent” union SINTTIA at the General Motors assembly plant in Silao, central Mexico, which is struggling to impose a contract reached in backroom talks with the company.

On April 4 and 5, SINTTIA will oversee a vote to ratify an agreement that does not come close to meeting demands that were approved in an assembly in December and were the backdrop to leadership elections in February.

Even though a small minority of workers participated in these dubious votes, the union is violating even the distorted expression of what it claims represents the will of the workers.

SINTTIA is also violating the legally binding strike deadline of “precisely the first minute of the 25th of March 2024,” which appears in the formal document of demands voted on in December and issued to the company and labor authorities in January.

Besides renouncing several promised bonuses, including one for high seniority workers, the union apparatus agreed to a 9.2 percent yearly wage increase compared to the 15 percent demanded initially, which workers already described to the *World Socialist Web Site* as “measly.”

Workers denounce this as less than the 10 percent approved last year, pointing out that inflation “eats up” most of the raise, having reached 7.82 percent in 2022 and 4.66 percent in 2023.

Moreover, it does virtually nothing to compensate for the historic fall in average real wages for car assembly workers, which halved from \$6.65 per hour in 1994 to \$3.14 in 2016. In this period, their American counterparts saw a drop from \$39.91 to \$28.6 per hour.

The average wage for operators at GM Silao is currently about 75 pesos or \$3.47 in 2016 dollars. A

100 percent increase, or doubling of wages, would barely match the income level of three decades ago when the plant was built. And this would only cost GM an additional \$30,000 per hour, while workers are pumping out 65 units per hour of profitable Silverado and GMC Sierra trucks that cost anywhere from \$42,500 to \$82,500.

SINTTIA said in a statement the agreement represents a “substantial improvement” for workers and has responded with undisguised hostility to the avalanche of criticism on its social media, threatening to hang workers out to dry with a strike, while making clear it will not fight for any significant changes.

In a comment “liked” by 21 others, a worker named Eli summed up the response of the union: “Intimidation with an indefinite strike and little progress, and no pay? We all know that when there is a strike, there should be pay.”

An image shared widely on social media calls it an “employer contract” and says the union has an obligation to offer strike pay and then compensate for any lost income.

Workers who spoke to the *WSWS* stressed that the union takes the side of management on a daily basis and fails to enforce even their most basic rights.

One of the most frequent complaints is that the union sides with team leaders (LET) who are abusive of workers. An assembly worker said he was familiar with a recent case of a new co-worker who asked for support in stopping harassment by his LET, but union official Juan Carlos Camero did nothing to help. As a result, the young worker “attempted to take his own life due to stress.”

From personal experience, the assembly worker said the union has also ignored his complaints against supervisors regarding abusive language, being forced to

carry heavy parts when machines break down and not being allowed to go to the bathroom, which all violate existing clauses in the contract. “Harassment issues are always left under review, not only women but now also men suffer harassment at work by the LETs,” he said.

When workers request their mandated vacation days, the union and management say there is no one to replace them. “They don’t comply” with the contract, he said. “Eventually this brings consequences like ill health,” the worker said. “My back hurts. Sometimes I lie on my bed and my waist hurts.”

“It is a company union,” he concludes.

Another worker at the plant commented to this reporter: “In fact, we are not aware of any case in which the union has intervened and favored those affected. This union, like the previous one, does not defend the workers.”

He then referred to the recent case of Francisco Tapia, a worker who published a video on social media describing how union leader Alejandra Morales personally signed the letter to fire him after working six years at the plant, instead of offering any help. Tapia then had to borrow money to pay for transportation to get home.

Asked about attitudes toward the contract, the second worker said: “I sense that opinion is very divided for and against, but we will only know for sure after the vote. Although there could be fraud in this one as always, it is undeniable that the CFDCRL [federal labor court] is very much in favor of SINTTIA.”

Broader conclusions can and must be drawn from these experiences. After years of leaving their bodies on the line, suffering constant abuse during 12-hour shifts, and missing irreplaceable occasions with their loved ones, workers are disposed of as expendable. This is a capitalist dictatorship, defining life inside and outside the factory.

But it goes beyond that. Management, the government and the union apparatus are weapons to wage a class war against workers on an international scale, with the most far-reaching implications.

General Motors has already notified shareholders that it expects to increase dividend payments by 33 percent this year through a major escalation of “cost cutting,” and SINTTIA’s contract is part of those plans.

GM and other automakers have already eliminated thousands of jobs across the United States and Europe,

and workers in Mexico cannot consider themselves as immune since these cuts are driven by automation and competition against Chinese companies in the production of cheaper electric vehicles, which require less labor than gasoline-powered cars.

Economic competition, however, is inseparable from preparations for military conflict, and Mexico is key in both arenas. Enforcing wartime discipline in factories while cutting labor costs even further, not to speak of mobilizing Mexican society as a whole for war, have become existential political needs for US imperialism. And this requires blocking any international rebellion of rank-and-file workers against the union bureaucracies.

Last week, Brandon Mancilla, a regional director of the United Auto Workers (UAW) wrote in *Labor Notes* that the American bureaucracy had decided to send organizers to work on and coordinate campaigns with the Mexican “independent” unions, including SINTTIA, as well as engage in other forms of cooperation.

“When our Mexican union family goes on strike,” writes Mancilla, “we’ll provide assistance to help them hold out against the companies’ pressure to settle for less than they deserve.”

Workers must be forewarned that this is empty bluster from the bureaucracy. The UAW and the unions like SINTTIA sponsored by the AFL-CIO and the US State Department are entirely integrated into the capitalist state and management. They are materially and politically committed to the war on two fronts of US imperialism: against both its geopolitical rivals and the working class.

A genuine global fight in defense of the independent interests of the working class—including for decent wages, a shorter workweek, secure jobs, pensions and healthcare, democracy at the workplace and an end to imperialist war—must be waged against the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions and governments. This is the struggle being organized by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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