

Brazil's Morenoite-led union federation cements ties with UAW based on support for war

Eduardo Parati, Guilherme Ferreira

22 May 2024

Amid the escalation of the imperialist war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza, the world's ruling elites are promoting a corporatist alliance with the trade unions in favor of militarism and the suppression of the class struggle.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has exposed extensively in recent weeks, the Labor Notes conference, held April 19-21 in Chicago, marked a new stage in this process, laying bare the reactionary politics of the unions and the pseudo-left around them. Particularly significant at the conference was the participation of Shawn Fain, the UAW president who has been promoting a corporatist alliance with the administration of "Genocide Joe" Biden and, at the end of January endorsed his re-election.

For years, Labor Notes has played a sordid role by combining a rejection of "politics" that has subordinated unions to the pro-war Democratic Party with the promotion of corrupt union bureaucracies internationally as defenders of workers' interests. Today, in an explosive international context, this means the integration of the unions globally into US imperialism's war drive against Russia and China.

One union federation that regularly participates in these conferences is the Brazilian CSP-Conlutas, controlled by the Morenoite Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU). In addition to attending the Labor Notes conference, CSP-Conlutas officials met with Fain and other UAW bureaucrats and participated in an event organized by a series of pseudo-left organizations, including the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), which have functioned as a "left" cover for imperialism, acting as factions of the Democratic Party.

The CSP-Conlutas delegation was made up of bureaucrats from the Metalworkers Union of São José dos Campos (SMSJC), an important industrial city in the countryside of São Paulo that is home to one of GM's three plants in Brazil. More significantly, it is located in Brazil's most important defense industry hub, with companies such as aviation giant Embraer, which produces military aircraft, Brazil's largest arms company, Avibras, and a recently inaugurated Boeing Engineering and Technology Center. São José dos Campos is also home to numerous Brazilian Air Force facilities and bases.

CSP-Conlutas officials meet with Fain and UAW bureaucrats

The topic of the April 17 meeting with Fain, described by CSP-Conlutas as "one of the main union officials in the American automotive sector," was "the struggles and situation of workers in the automotive sector in Brazil and the United States," according to the Brazilian union's website.

Expressing the union bureaucracy's growing concern about the automotive industry's shift towards electric vehicles, Antônio Lisboa, director of the SMSJC, stated at the meeting that "it would be interesting for us to share information about GM's projects, with new technologies, electric cars, investment prospects." He and other SMSJC union officials also denounced GM's persecution of union members, with the company

having "arbitrarily dismissed CSP-Conlutas [national executive secretary] and GM worker Luiz Carlos Prates, known as Mancha."

According to a report on the SMSJC website, "The UAW has pledged to join the fight against the automaker's persecution in Brazil." The CSP-Conlutas website also reported that "UAW vice-president Mike Booth, who is responsible for negotiations with GM in the US, has also pledged to forward the demands of the Brazilian comrades" to the automaker.

As the reports made clear, the CSP-Conlutas officials didn't meet with representatives of the American autoworkers, but with junior partners of the American automakers themselves. The response by unions internationally to capitalist globalization, beginning in the late 1970s, was ever-increasing labor-management cooperation that transformed the unions into extensions of the corporations. The UAW and its president vividly embody the corporatist integration of unions into corporations and the American state.

The CSP-Conlutas' cover for Fain and the UAW was made even more explicit by the fact that the meeting was held, according to the CSP-Conlutas website, "after the historic strikes carried out by the metalworkers against the US and Brazilian auto companies" last October. What the CSP-Conlutas and the UAW consider "historic strikes" were nothing more than fresh defeats for the American and Brazilian working class.

Working in close contact with the Biden administration, which made the US president the first to visit a picket line, the UAW's "stand-up strike" against the Big Three in the US was limited to a handful of plants and paved the way for further layoffs in the US auto industry. In the 17-day strike last October and November at GM's three plants in Brazil, launched largely outside of union control, CSP-Conlutas and other union federations made futile appeals to the governments of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party - PT) and the far-right governor of São Paulo, Tarcísio de Freitas, and welcomed the court decision that blocked the firing of 1,200 workers.

This didn't stop almost 700 workers at the São José dos Campos plant alone from joining a voluntary dismissal plan proposed by GM and, at the beginning of May, the company's firing of a further 55 who had allegedly won job stability in negotiations with the union. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the number of workers at GM's plant in São José dos Campos has fallen from 12,000 to 3,300 today.

Fraudulent "international solidarity" between CSP-Conlutas and UAW

Having overseen mass layoffs and plant closures, the UAW and CSP-Conlutas have been leaning on each other in an attempt to improve their badly discredited images among the rank-and-file. Reporting on the meeting with Fain, the Metalworkers Union of São José dos Campos website boasted that it "and the UAW have a history of mutual solidarity

in the workers' struggle," which included a trip by CSP-Conlutas officials to the US last year in which they visited picket lines during the "stand-up strike" and attended an event organized by UAW Local 551.

One of the pickets they visited was at the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant, one of the struck plants that became a focal point for the opposition against a sellout by the UAW. The effort by the Brazilian and American union bureaucrats was particularly a response to the intervention of the WSWs and the socialist candidate in the 2022 UAW presidential election, Will Lehman, who encouraged the rejection of the UAW-backed contract in early October at the Mack Trucks plant based on an internationally coordinated struggle that they feared would be repeated at other plants.

The intention to forge a supposed internationalist alliance between the UAW and CSP-Conlutas was taken even further by SMSJC official Lisboa, who suggested to Fain holding an "international meeting and the need to unite workers to, for example, organize a campaign for a reduction in working hours" in response to the shift towards electric vehicles.

Far from organizing the working class independently and in a unified international struggle through a global strategy against transnational corporations, what the union bureaucracy is proposing are fraudulent campaigns that, in the end, restrict the struggle along national lines and subordinate it to the bourgeois state. This was exposed at the beginning of May by Mancha, who responded to the closure of the GM plants in Colombia and Ecuador by writing that "CSP-Conlutas also stands in solidarity with the Colombian and Ecuadorian workers affected by GM's arbitrary decision and joins the call for the governments to take measures to prevent the closure of the plants and guarantee the jobs and rights of the workers."

CSP-Conlutas' promotion of "independent unions" supported by US imperialism

After the meeting with Fain, the CSP-Conlutas delegation attended the Labor Notes conference, which, according to it, "reinforced the need for international solidarity in the struggles of the working class."

Mancha, a member of the CSP-Conlutas national executive, took part in a panel titled "Auto Workers of the World, Unite!" along with union bureaucrats from Europe, the UAW and César Orta, of the Independent Union of Audi Workers (SITAUDI) in Mexico. One of the main subjects discussed on the panel was the "huge shift to electric vehicles" and how "workers across the world are taking on the big automakers," according to Labor Notes in its presentation of the panel.

In fact, it would be better titled "Trade Union Bureaucracies of the World, Unite!" In every country, the union bureaucracies have overseen the implementation of sell-out contracts to intensify workforce exploitation and eliminate jobs in the transition to electric vehicles. As a result, workers' struggles have increasingly clashed with the union bureaucracy amid increased strikes and walkouts.

CSP-Conlutas has been following this process with attention and concern, particularly in the US through the Labor Notes conferences. It has welcomed "the strong process of reorganization [of unionism]," as it wrote on its website in 2022. In his address at this year's conference, Mancha again referred to this process, saying: "This conference takes on even more importance this year, due to the growth of strikes and the union movement, with new entities and the increase in unionization of youth."

What it refers to as the "reorganization of unionism" says a lot about the CSP-Conlutas' orientation towards imperialism. In addition to unionization at Amazon warehouses and Starbucks stores in the US, dominated largely by the pseudo-left and consequently oriented towards the Democratic Party, CSP-Conlutas has closely welcomed the formation of "independent unions," particularly in Mexico where SINTAUDI is just one example.

In June 2022, Mancha attended the Labor Notes conference alongside Israel Cervantes, one of the leaders of the rank-and-file organization "Generando Movimiento" at the GM plant in Silao, Mexico, which later

derailed this movement into the formation of the National Independent Union of Workers in the Auto Industry (SINTTIA). Earlier that year, CSP-Conlutas was one of the "more than 15 national and international unions and organizations [that] arrived in Silao to show their solidarity with the workers at GM and their worker led independent union," according to a video by "UAW Women" published on Facebook at the time.

What Mancha and the CSP-Conlutas conceal is that the creation of SINTTIA, SINTAUDI, and other "independent unions" is part of an operation by US imperialism, through the AFL-CIO's government-funded Solidarity Center, to suppress the tremendous rank-and-file rebellion against totally discredited unions and try to give them a new face, including a supposed "internationalist" outlook.

The CSP-Conlutas emerged in 2004 amid countless betrayals of the workers' struggle, particularly against attacks by neoliberal governments in the 1990s in Brazil, and the growing integration of the PT-controlled CUT union federation into the first two Lula governments (2003-2010). Today, it faces being discredited along similar lines, with a drop in the number of affiliated unions and, consequently, of dues-paying members. The most significant exposure of this process happened at the beginning of last year, when the National Association of Higher Education Teachers (ANDES), which has 70,000 members, decided to disaffiliate from CSP-Conlutas, because, among other reasons, of its support for imperialist wars in Libya, Syria and, more recently, Ukraine.

CSP-Conlutas' defense of "Ukrainian resistance" at Labor Notes conferences and militarism in Brazil

One of the aims of CSP-Conlutas at the Labor Notes conference was to drum up support for imperialist war from the unions attending it. The figure behind this operation has been Herbert Claros, an Embraer worker, a former member of the company's board of directors and a leader of the CSP-Conlutas international sector. Since 2014, when CSP-Conlutas attended the conference for the first time, he has participated in discussions with representatives of American unions inside and outside the conference, particularly the UAW.

Claros is also a leader of the International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggle (ILNSS), of which CSP-Conlutas is a member, which has been working in close contact with the organization Sotsialnyi Rukh to build support for the "Ukrainian resistance" against "Russian imperialism," including its extensive arming by the US and NATO.

In 2014, a year after the founding of the ILNSS, CSP-Conlutas wrote on its website that it "also intends to discuss with Labor Notes unions the need for greater articulation of these independent entities, through the ILNSS." At the 2022 conference, Herbert Claros took part in the panel "Trade unions and workers facing political repression," in which he stressed "the need to stand firm and extend support to the Ukrainian people who have been resisting the Russian invasion since February."

In recent years, Claros' and CP-Conlutas' defense of the "Ukrainian resistance" has been accompanied by a virulent nationalist and militarist campaign in Brazil. They have been the most prominent defenders of the Brazilian defense industry under the "leftist" cover that the Lula government, with the support of the Armed Forces, should nationalize companies like Embraer and Avibras, the latter of which is in a judicial recovery process.

At a seminar earlier this year titled "The defense industry and the future of Avibras," Claros argued that if Brazil is invaded, "we will be in a worse position than Ukraine." He went on to say that "we, [the] true patriots," should even take up arms in that case, but "for that, I want to have a strong Avibras, I want to have a strong Embraer, a Brazilian defense company to defend the sovereignty of the country and that the Brazilian armed forces act in the interest of training workers and under the control of workers to defend their sovereignty."

The fight against the pro-imperialist union bureaucracy and world war

This militarist and nationalist perspective is completely in line with that of Labor Notes, its political sponsors, and the UAW. Labor Notes was founded in the 1970s by members of the International Socialists, followers of Max Shachtman, who in 1940 broke with the Fourth International and later became a supporter of US imperialism's military interventions and an advisor to the AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

Fain and the UAW, meanwhile, have been at the forefront of US imperialism's plans to impose a "war economy" in preparation for open conflict with Russia and China. At the Labor Notes conference, where he was wearing a sweater emblazoned with the image of a bomber and the phrase "Arsenal of Democracy," Fain called workers the "greatest army in the world."

As for the PSTU, which controls the Metalworkers Union of São José dos Campos and the CSP-Conlutas, its origins lie in the politics of the Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno, who broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1963. His intention to "update" the Transitional Program and the consequent abandonment of the theory of permanent revolution led him and his political heirs to repeatedly subordinate the struggle of the working class to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists, from General Peron in Argentina in the 1950s to Fidel Castro in Cuba, and even to the Argentine military junta during the Falklands war in the 1980s. More recently, the Morenoites have sought to subordinate workers' struggles to "democratic" imperialism in its interventions in the Middle East and Ukraine.

The CSP-Conlutas' declares itself the only "independent" union federation in Brazil, a claim that has also been fraudulently promoted by a significant part of the pseudo-left that is not acting in the PT-controlled CUT. In reality, its defense of "national sovereignty" opposes the independent mobilization of workers and subordinates their struggles to the Brazilian capitalist state, including the military. Moreover, as its recent tour of the US showed, it is working to integrate the working class and the defense industry in Brazil into the US war machine.

In a powerful speech at the May Day rally organized by the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International, Will Lehman said: "What we as workers need to connect as a class is that the struggle against exploitation is the same as the struggle against war," since the roots of both lie in the capitalist system. At the same time, considering the nationalist and pro-capitalist character of the unions, he explained, "The struggle against exploitation in the factories and the imperialist war abroad cannot be won by relying on the union bureaucracies."

For this, workers in Brazil, the US, and around the world need to break with the union bureaucracies, organize themselves into independent rank-and-file committees, and unite with their class brothers and sisters internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees in a common struggle for socialism.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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