

Mass layoffs, inflation fuel strikes across Mexico

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27 March 2026

Mexico is witnessing a marked upturn in class struggle as inflation, mass layoffs and factory closures provoke a wave of strikes and strike deadlines in key sectors—above all auto and auto parts, education and services.

Similar pressures—soaring prices, speed?ups, layoffs—are propelling a parallel strike wave north of the border in the United States, including the important strike by 3,800 meatpacking workers at JBS in Greeley, Colorado, underscoring the objective basis for a common, international struggle.

The union bureaucracies, however, including the so-called “independent” unions in Mexico, are working relentlessly to contain workers’ anger by confining their strategy to appeals to the administration of President Claudia Sheinbaum and the labor courts—institutions that exist to safeguard the profit interests of transnational corporations and keep Mexican labor cheap.

The looming conflict at General Motors’ giant Silao assembly plant in Guanajuato, which employs roughly 7,000 workers and is one of the key hubs of the North American auto chain, provides a sense of the overall picture. GM workers had backed the demand raised by the “independent” union SINTTIA for a 20 percent wage increase, a figure that, even if won, would barely keep pace with rising prices.

At Silao, the union has already signaled its role as an arm of management: it agreed to postpone the strike hours before the deadline, announcing a preliminary deal for a wage increase of just 10 percent now, another 1 percent in October and a further 1 percent for certain categories in December—an 11-12 percent raise over two years amid accelerating inflation, without any concrete gains on hours, break times or safety conditions, which are central issues for workers on the line.

The reaction among Silao workers has been one of anger and contempt. On social media and in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers have called the agreement a “joke,” a “disappointment” and a “circus.” One worker summed up the prevailing sentiment: “The union told us half the truth. They made us lose a rest day in a meeting where

they said they would not back down.”

For the rank and file, this sellout has confirmed that the union will not organize any serious struggle, but will instead seek to prevent any disruption to GM’s production and profit stream. Workers are scheduled to vote on the agreement in early April, with a potential strike setting the stage for a major confrontation whose outcome will have repercussions across the entire auto industry.

In the sprawling network of plants owned by First Brands Group—covering brands like Tridonex, Trico, Cardone and Autolite—workers producing parts for Ford and General Motors have been hit by a wave of closures after the parent company’s bankruptcy filing in the United States. In Matamoros, Tamaulipas alone, across the border from Texas, around 5,000 auto?parts workers are directly affected, while more than 10,800 maquiladora factory jobs—about 4 percent of the sector’s workforce in the state—have been wiped out just in the first quarter of 2026.

Workers have responded with militant defensive actions that go beyond the legal framework of “conciliation.” At Tridonex in Matamoros, they have launched a plant occupation and strike, while Trico workers compelled the union to announce a strike. However, these occupations and strikes are being framed by the unions not as a defense of jobs, but merely to prevent the removal of machinery to cover severance pay and outstanding wages.

The struggle at Tornel, a tire manufacturer, has revealed both the ferocity of employer repression and the courage of workers. More than 2,000 workers, including 1,050 who are unionized, have been on strike since late February across several plants. Their demands include overdue wage increases of 7 and 5 percent, improvements in lagging benefits and, crucially, a reduction in working hours in a sector where workers are exposed to lead, carbon black and dyes that gravely affect their health.

On March 18, after three weeks on strike, workers maintaining the picket at the Tultitlán plant came under gunfire from company thugs around 4:00 a.m., leaving four strikers wounded. Striking workers apprehended two of the

attackers, who were reportedly wearing company uniforms.

In a powerful show of resolve following the shooting, workers held a court-supervised vote on March 22 on whether to continue the strike. Of the 1,051 workers eligible to vote, 883 voted to maintain the strike and only 113 to end it. This overwhelming defiance of armed intimidation stands in sharp contrast to the response of the union leadership and the government.

Gerardo Meneses Ávila, general secretary of the National Union of Tornel Workers, has responded by appealing for the “direct intervention of the president of the Republic, Claudia Sheinbaum,” and her ministers “to prevent labor rights from being violated.” The federal Labor Secretary, Marath Bolaños, answered the shooting by insisting that “social dialogue and legality are the only way to resolve labor conflicts”—that is, to return the struggle into channels tightly controlled by the state and employers.

At Goodyear México, a strike deadline was over wage demands, with the company offering around 4.7 percent while the union called for roughly 15 percent and a broader contract review.

While, on its surface, these are traditional contract negotiations, the growing struggles unfold against a backdrop of war, automation, and cross-border supply chain and profit-driven restructuring.

Beyond the auto sector, major struggles include:

- At Nacional Monte de Piedad, a large pawn-broking and social assistance institution with over 300 branches, some 2,300 workers have been on strike since October 2025—more than five months—over contract violations, cuts to benefits and disputes over management decisions, with the union now threatening to escalate the legal battle up to the Supreme Court.

- In education, the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) led a 72-hour nationwide stoppage from March 18 to 20, with mass mobilizations in Mexico City and other states. Teachers are demanding the repeal of the 2007 ISSSTE pension law, the elimination of regressive education reforms and a significant wage increase, and are warning that they may escalate toward an indefinite national strike.

- In higher education and science, multiple unions—such as STAHUACH, SUTUACM, SPAUAZ and SUTIN—have filed strike deadlines and organized coordinated mobilizations over wages, job security and funding, with a notable strike at the Autonomous University of Chapingo. There, the union is confronting a 4 percent wage cap imposed by the Finance Ministry while it demands a 30 percent increase.

- Caterpillar workers have carried out a strike that has paralyzed operations for more than two and a half years, since September 23, 2023 to demand an initial collective bargaining agreement.

All of this is unfolding under conditions of mounting inflation and an accelerating wave of job cuts. Annual inflation reached about 4.6 percent in the first half of March. While fuel subsidies have so far cushioned the immediate impact of higher global oil prices, imports and basic goods are steadily becoming more expensive.

Since August 2023, formal manufacturing employment has fallen from 3 million to 2.82 million—a net loss of 180,000 jobs by the end of 2025—with layoffs intensifying this year, particularly in the maquiladoras.

What unites all these conflicts—from GM Silao and the plant occupations in Matamoros to the Tornel strike, teacher stoppages and JBS—is their fundamentally political character. Mexico plays a central role in the North American and global economy as a low-wage export platform for auto, electronics, agriculture and other industries that directly feed US imperialism’s drive for hegemony through war and recolonization.

The defense of jobs, wages and conditions in Mexico is inseparable from the struggle against the imperialist war drive and the assault on labor and democratic rights across the continent.

What is urgently needed is the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace—“sellout-proof” organizations that workers control directly and that can link up across factories, industries and national borders. As part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), these committees can coordinate their struggles with teachers, industrial workers and public employees in the US, Canada and beyond, countering the mobility of capital and the use of new technologies to undermine their power.

Only through such an independent, international offensive of the working class can the working people of Mexico defend their rights, oppose war and fight for a society organized on the basis of human need rather than corporate profit.



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