

Pseudo-lefts work to chain Mexico's strike wave to US-trained union apparatus

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Mexico is experiencing an upturn in strikes across industry, education and services as layoffs, inflation, plant closures and contract conflicts drive workers into struggle. But the decisive issue is not only the sharpness of the attacks; it is the role played by the union bureaucracy, including the supposedly “independent” unions, in channeling this anger back behind the labor courts, the capitalist state and the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum.

As part of its now clearly defined tasks on behalf of this bureaucracy, the Movement of Socialist Workers (MTS) and its publication *La Izquierda Diario* have sought to provide a “left” cover for this entire operation aimed at suppressing the class struggle and protecting the investment interests of transnational corporations, while keeping Mexico “competitive” as a low-wage platform for global production.

Significantly, in each case, the MTS has focused on underpinning the authority of the National Union of Workers (UNT), New Workers Central (UNT) and other unions most openly backed and trained by the American union bureaucracy and government through the Solidarity Center, a direct agency of US imperialism.

The MTS, which belongs to the Morenoite Permanent Revolution Current led by the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) in Argentina, is intervening aggressively in these struggles to prevent workers from developing a genuinely independent movement linked to their class brothers and sisters in the United States and internationally.

Tornel Tire Workers

The struggle at Tornel has become one of the most important and courageous labor conflicts in Mexico. The strike began in late February 2026, and the confrontation quickly escalated when company thugs opened fire on strikers at the Tultitlán plant on March 18, wounding four workers. Despite that violence, workers voted overwhelmingly on March 22 to continue the strike, with 883 votes in favor and 113 against, confirming a deep mood of militancy and determination. The issues in dispute include wages, contractual compliance, safety, and the reduction of work hours in a plant where workers are exposed to lead, carbon black and toxic materials that seriously damage their health.

The MTS has sought to use Tornel to reinforce the authority of the union apparatus rather than to break workers from it. It published a statement by the Agrupación Desde las Bases Telefonistas, their tendency within the Telephone Workers Union (STRM) that belongs in turn to the National Workers Union (UNT), and had one of its own leaders, Javier Castellanos, speak at the solidarity festival held outside the plant in Tultitlán on March 29. The line advanced there was not the development of independent rank-and-file power, but the strengthening of strike funds and the creation of a “great coordinating committee” for solidarity still operating through the same union structures that have repeatedly contained and betrayed workers.

The significance of this intervention lies in the slogan used by the MTS in almost every struggle: the need to “twist the arm” of the company. That slogan is a weak syndicalist formula that tells workers that their only task

is to pressure management for concessions, not to fight for control over production, to reorganize the plant on the basis of workers’ needs, or to build a movement against the capitalist system itself.

A genuinely revolutionary organization would tell workers that the issue is not forcing the boss to bargain, but taking power over the workplace conditions and production and linking that struggle across the economy and internationally. The MTS instead reduces the conflict to bargaining leverage and protecting the seat at the table of bureaucrats who enforce sellout deals and layoffs.

Crucially the MTS helps organize such “solidarity” festivals with other union bureaucracies and pseudo-left organizations to make the workers feel “accompanied,” while speaking not a critical word against the Tornel union, which also belongs to the UNT, and is basing the struggle entirely on appeals to the Sheinbaum administration.

This is exactly the same method its partners in Argentina use. In the struggle against the shutdown at the FATE tire plant, the PTS and its allies in the Left and Workers Front have used “solidarity plenaries” to create the illusion that the struggle could be advanced by leaning on Peronist legislators and the Buenos Aires provincial government. They presented the fight as one that could be won by pressure on bourgeois institutions, not through workers’ power. The result has been to encourage illusions in the Peronist politicians and union bureaucracies. The MTS is doing the same in Mexico under the banner of solidarity with Tornel.

GM Silao

At General Motors’ Silao plant, one of the largest auto assembly sites in Mexico, the conflict has centered on a strike deadline, wage demands and the question of whether the union bureaucracy will mobilize workers or impose another sellout. The strike was initially pushed back after a preliminary agreement that offered a 10 percent raise, far from the 15 percent initially demanded by the union, not to speak of any improvements in working conditions, safety, break times and speed-ups. Workers were scheduled to vote on the agreement on April 9-10, and if they rejected it the strike would be triggered.

The MTS has criticized the agreement, correctly pointing out that the offer amounts to only about 50 pesos per day, or roughly the cost of two kilos of tortillas. But once again it frames the issue as a matter of exerting more pressure on the negotiating commission of the “independent union” SINTTIA rather than organizing an independent fight by workers themselves. It calls on workers to vote “no,” “prepare the strike,” and do so “hand-in-hand with the negotiating commission.”

That leaves the initiative in the hands of the same apparatus, which is already pushing a concessionary agreement. In the case of SINTTIA, it was installed in the plant with not only the direct financing of the Solidarity Center, but the backing of the US Embassy.

The key political problem is not whether the workers are sufficiently militant, but whether they are free from the grip of the union machinery and its imperialist backers.

Silao has enormous significance because it is one of the central nodes of

the North American auto supply chain and because workers there have already shown solidarity with US autoworkers in the past. The class issue is therefore international. Yet the MTS does not build on that history to call for coordination with workers in the US and Canada. Instead, it keeps the fight trapped in the framework of a national bargaining process, which is exactly what the company and the union bureaucracy want.

First Brands plants

The shutdowns at First Brands plants, including Tridonex, Trico and other facilities in Matamoros, Chihuahua and Baja California, represent a different stage of the same crisis. Here the issue is not simply a wage negotiation but a broader industrial collapse driven by bankruptcy, restructuring and mass layoffs. Workers have occupied factories to prevent the removal of machinery, demanded severance and unpaid wages, and staged protests in several cities. More than 5,000 workers have already been thrown out of work, and many more are under threat.

The MTS's intervention here is relevant due to its limited character, having issued only one statement when the initial layoffs took place in January, and nothing since. This MTS statement is critical of the "legalism" of the "independent union" SNITIS and its leader Susana Prieto Terrazas, but it limits the criticism to tactics on the need to unite actions among Mexican First Brands workers for better bargaining power, far from any appeal to mobilize a necessary cross-border struggle against capitalism.

That is why its posture is so dangerous. Workers in one plant cannot defend their jobs and conditions against the relocation of capital and transformation of entire industries by appealing only to local legal channels. They need a political movement that unites all affected plants and connects them with workers facing similar attacks elsewhere.

The MTS offers no answer to that problem. It instead encourages confidence in "independent" union structures that are already being integrated into the legal and administrative framework of the state.

Monte de Piedad

The strike at Nacional Monte de Piedad—Mexico's national non-profit pawnshop, founded in the 18th century, that offers loans to people by accepting valuables as collateral—has lasted since October 2025.

The issues include contract violations, cuts to benefits and disputes over management decisions. More than 300 branches are affected, and the conflict has raised the possibility of broader judicial intervention, including appeals to the Supreme Court. This is a dispute not just over one institution, but over the entire framework through which the unions and the state regulate labor relations.

The MTS treats this conflict as another occasion to call for wider support through existing union channels rather than to expose the class nature of the legal process. Its approach is to argue for solidarity committees and pressure from "democratic" unions, while leaving intact the illusion that the courts and the government can be used as arbiters. But the courts are not neutral. They are part of the capitalist state and they defend the profits of the employers and the financial interests tied to the institution.

CNTE strike

The MTS's intervention in the 72-hour national strike this month of the CNTE teachers also reveals the same pattern. The CNTE has a more militant history than many other union formations during the current Morena party government, and it has mobilized large numbers of teachers against pension and education reforms. But its strategy remains bound to negotiations with the authorities, not to a break with the state.

The MTS is integrated into that structure, and one of its leading members, Mercedes Flores, belongs to the National and State Political Directorate of the CNTE in Sonora and the National Single Negotiation Commission, the CNUN-CNTE. That is not the position of an outside critic; it is the position of someone embedded in the bureaucracy.

The MTS writes: "From the unity, first of all, of the sectors in struggle

and the unions that claim to be democratic, it is necessary to promote broad, open and decisive spaces where workers, young students and popular sectors discuss a common plan to confront this model." On the surface this sounds combative, but in reality it is another call to build broad fronts around the existing union structures tied to the government and US imperialism rather than independent organizations of workers. It is a recipe for subordinating the struggle to the same "democratic" union apparatus that repeatedly channels teachers back toward negotiations with the state.

The history behind the apparatus

The political role of the UNT and related "independent" unions must be understood historically. They were not created as organs of working-class self-emancipation but as mechanisms to replace the hated and gangster-ridden Mexican Workers Central (CTM) with a more adaptable structure under conditions of growing class unrest and US intervention.

It fits a long pattern of AFL-CIO operations in Mexico and throughout Latin America. The US labor bureaucracy has repeatedly acted as an auxiliary of Washington's foreign policy, using "democratic unions" as instruments to discipline labor and block revolutionary movements. In Mexico, it helped build and consolidate the CROM and later the CTM, both of which tied workers to the bourgeois state and to US corporate interests.

After decades of supporting the CTM, Washington shifted to promoting "independent" unions. Since its launch in 1997, the UNT was financed and trained as the prime example of this model. But the goal remained the same: to create a more flexible mechanism for containing labor unrest and preventing it from escaping national and bureaucratic bounds.

This is why the MTS is such a useful partner for the AFL-CIO. The MTS gives this entire apparatus a pseudo-left veneer. It can speak the language of solidarity and organizing "from below" while directing workers back into the orbit of the very forces that police labor on behalf of capital. That is the real political function of its interventions.

The alternative is clear. Mexican workers need rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy, the courts and the state, and linked across sectors and across borders, especially with workers in the United States who are themselves seeing an escalation of strike activity and mass protests against war, dictatorship, and capitalist exploitation.



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