

# Death of autoworker in Mexico exposes contempt of GM and union apparatus for workers' lives

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The death last week of a worker at the General Motors Silao Complex in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, after suffering a heart attack and reportedly going without emergency care, is the latest expression of the expendability of the lives of autoworkers for capitalist profit.

On May 4, Jesús Martín Olivera died from a heart attack while working in the GRX transmissions plant of the GM complex in Silao. Martín was a veteran at the plant with 18 years of experience at only 36 years of age. He leaves behind four children.

Workers at the plant have responded with outrage, denouncing what they describe as a company medical service whose overriding purpose is to return injured and ill workers to the line as quickly as possible, as well as a total lack of trained personnel and equipment for resuscitation. Some have called for a work stoppage until safer conditions are guaranteed.

One worker, speaking with *Diario Irapuato*, captured the sentiment: “At GM we don’t have good medical service inside the company. If we feel ill, the doctor just gives us a pill for dizziness or a headache and doesn’t bother to do a proper examination—she just sits there and supposedly works. A colleague just died because of her utter lack of medical knowledge and first aid. I am calling on my colleagues for a work stoppage until they guarantee they will hire someone qualified to do their job.”

The death remained unreported to the broader public by management, the leadership of the Independent Union of the Auto Industry (SINTTIA), or government authorities until May 8, when a minority faction of the union, the Movimiento Azul, issued a statement denouncing the company’s negligence.

The statement revealed what Martín’s final minutes looked like. He had informed his supervisor that he was feeling ill and was going to the company medical service. At 6:20 a.m., his supervisor was informed by a co-worker that Martín had collapsed, grabbing his chest and calling for

help—barely 50 meters from the doctor’s office. Co-workers helped lift him into a wheelchair brought by the doctor, who said they had to wait for an ambulance coming from the assembly plant. That ambulance did not arrive until 6:40 a.m., despite the fact that an ambulance was already present at the facility — there were simply no keys and no driver. At no point was CPR or any other attempt at resuscitation performed.

The statement describes a brief meeting held afterward in which plant executives and the SINTTIA general secretary, Alejandra Morales, informed workers of the death. There, a worker raised the question of safety and asked, “What would happen to me if I got hurt doing my job—would they not help me?” The response from management and the union was simply: “We’ll look into it.”

The Movimiento Azul statement concludes by appealing to SINTTIA’s general secretary and social welfare secretary to “fulfill their responsibility to ‘watch over and fight for the physical integrity of union members.’” But while the statement remains silent on the union’s long record of shutting down complaints and helping cover up accidents and unsafe conditions, workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* were not: they immediately and directly blamed SINTTIA alongside the company for Martín’s death.

“The union only looks out for its own interests,” one worker said plainly. Another added:

What a disgrace. Can’t you see how the union makes no changes where they’re truly needed? And it’s not just about being at the front without a union. It’s about collaborating on improvements for workers, and they know very well that the stress, the long working hours, and the production demands the company imposes are killing workers.

A third worker described his own experience with the medical service:

They did the same to me yesterday—they just gave me pills and told me to leave, and didn't examine me at all. It was only after I sat down in the chair and the doctor asked if I needed something else that I told her I felt sick and was resting. I asked if I couldn't be there, and only then did she say she'd examine me.

Another worker reported waiting 30 minutes before receiving any attention when he couldn't breathe.

This death is inseparable from the grinding conditions imposed on workers at the complex, where 12-hour shifts are the norm. Workers at the plant must wake as early as 3:30 or 4 in the morning to arrive at the plant by 5:45 for a shift beginning at 6 a.m., not returning home until 7:15 or even 7:40 at night.

In previous reporting by the *World Socialist Web Site*, GM Silao workers have described colleagues “unfortunately injuring their backs and feet” under the heavy workload, with one noting that “stress can cause a lot of distress among employees—it can cause accidents or, in the worst cases, strokes or heart attacks.”

When machinery stops, workers are compelled to carry heavy equipment manually rather than halt production. Breaks are inadequate, and any appeal for relief is treated by management as insubordination. Workers have described being prevented by team leaders from taking a drink of water or going to the restroom for arriving a few minutes late. “It was torture because we were in the hot season,” one chassis assembly worker told the WSWS.

In this context, a cardiac event suffered by an exhausted worker on the floor is not a matter of misfortune—it is the foreseeable result of conditions that management and the unions have deliberately imposed.

The WSWS has documented the deadly consequences of this corporate indifference over many years. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Silao complex became a killing ground. Eleven workers at the plant died of the coronavirus, according to workers who spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*—deaths that were the direct outcome of the Andrés Manuel López Obrador government's decision to reopen Mexican manufacturing plants in May 2020, giving transnational corporations a blank check to sacrifice workers' lives for profits.

The pandemic has also laid bare the fundamental orientation of all the institutions supposedly responsible for

protecting workers. While rank-and-file workers in the Generating Movement group at Silao opposed GM's drive to expand production, declaring their solidarity with US autoworkers against placing production above workers' safety, the UAW bureaucracy was simultaneously urging workers to “push on.”

SINTTIA, the so-called “independent” union that replaced the gangster-ridden CTM at Silao in 2021, has proven no different in practice. Workers report that “neither of the two unions does anything for the workers; if they do anything at all.”

Now, as the world confronts a new outbreak—this time of hantavirus—the lessons of COVID-19 demand urgent assimilation. In April 2026, an outbreak of hantavirus infection caused by the Andes virus was identified on the Dutch cruise ship MV *Hondius*, resulting in confirmed deaths and critically ill patients across multiple countries. The Andes virus is the only type of hantavirus documented to spread from person to person, and patients can deteriorate with extreme rapidity—delayed care reduces the chance of survival.

For workers at GM Silao and throughout the international working class, the question of what to do is posed with increasing urgency as a matter of life and death. The unions—whether the CTM, SINTTIA, or the UAW—have demonstrated time and again that they function as instruments of corporate exploitation, not workers' interests.

The only way forward is for workers to build rank-and-file committees: genuinely democratic organizations, independent of the trade unions and all pro-capitalist forces, capable of uniting with autoworkers across North America and beyond—including for setting production speeds and shutting down the line when conditions are unsafe. Jesús Martín Olivera deserved emergency care. He deserved a safe workplace. His death must become a spur for workers to take matters into their own hands.



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