General Motors Mexico workers defend Bogdan Syrotiuk and support Will Lehman’s campaign

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Workers at the General Motors complex in Silao, Guanajuato—one of the largest and most profitable auto assembly operations in North America—have issued statements demanding the freedom of the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, supporting the campaign of socialist autoworker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers, and denouncing the slap on the wrist to the UAW official who threatened Lehman to death.

“We are ready to form rank-and-file committees to support Will Lehman’s campaign and defend Bogdan Syrotiuk,” one Silao worker told the WSWS. “I am against his imprisonment because they are denying him the right to free expression. And secondly, because opposing a pointless war and calling on others not to take part in it is also his right, and they must not repress it. Much less send him to prison. This is a completely reprehensible act.”

The statements from Mexican autoworkers linking the two cases cut through the nationalist divisions that the corporations, governments and the union apparatus work ceaselessly to foment.

On August 10, a court in Pervomaisk, Ukraine, sentenced Bogdan Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old Trotskyist and leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, to 15 years in prison for “high treason under martial law.” No evidence of espionage, sabotage or contact with the Russian military was ever produced. The prosecution rested entirely on six articles Bogdan published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and his correspondence with its editors.

His crime was to call for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war and to oppose the Zelensky government’s glorification of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera.

Bogdan has been imprisoned since April 25, 2024, is in ill health and has been denied urgently needed medical care for more than a year. Fifteen years in the Ukrainian penal system would be a death sentence.

Three weeks before the verdict in Ukraine, on July 16, Raymond Jensen Jr., a paid UAW International organizer, posted an AI-generated image on Will Lehman’s campaign Facebook page showing the candidate bound and gagged, blood running from his mouth, with a masked gunman aiming a rifle at his back.

UAW President Shawn Fain and the entire International Executive Board said nothing for two weeks. Only when Lehman confronted him directly during the July 30 presidential debate did Fain respond: “I don’t condone that stuff,” followed immediately by, “If you’re running for president, get ready, brother, because you’ll be getting them every day.”

On August 4, the court-appointed monitor suspended Jensen from UAW membership for two years and barred him permanently from running for any elected union position. But when Lehman’s attorneys asked the monitor’s office to confirm that Jensen had been removed from his post, they were told that whether he continues to be paid is for the union apparatus to decide. Jensen’s salary is $202,000 a year.

Having been stripped of membership, he may no longer have dues deducted—meaning the man who published a mock execution of a rank-and-file candidate could receive what amounts to a raise, financed by the dues of the workers he threatened.

The Silao workers grasped the essential point immediately. “The monitor is a mirage and a scarecrow, to give the appearance of change in the UAW,” one said. “The man who threatened Will Lehman only lost his membership, but they keep paying him.” He added: “The sister plants in Mexico have to oppose the threats against Will. I hope these statements reach the eyes and ears of those who are threatening Will.”

The monitor is fully capable of acting when it chooses. In December 2025 it forced out Fain’s chief of staff Chris Brooks from a $238,294-a-year post after finding that Fain and Brooks had fabricated charges against UAW Secretary

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Margaret Mock in retaliation for her refusal to authorize improper expenditures. What is at stake is not the monitor's authority but its priorities.

A second Silao worker spoke to the class questions underlying both cases. On the socialist convictions of Lehman and Syrotiuk, he said: "There are those of us who think about how workers can have a better standard of living. In Mexico, if you say that stuff, they may tell you, 'Well, that's what the unions are for. The union is made up of active workers.' Sure—but they put in their own cronies."

"Now, we have to be realistic," he continued. "Governments look after their own interests, that is, after the interests of corporate shareholders. They lose nothing. The ones who make the decisions are the governments and shareholders. If the shareholders want wars, they will put up the money, because it serves their interests. And if their interests are threatened, they come down on us at the very bottom of the social chain, which is the proletariat. I tell my coworkers, like Will Lehman does … I really don't want them to follow me. I want them to take a stand, to rebel when injustices are done to them."

"There are many cases like Bogdan's in the world," he said, adding that "here at work the injustices continue" and that workers must become far more outspoken about them. "Like the case of the young guy who died after collapsing in GRX—a week later nobody was saying anything about it. Right now there is a woman, a certified nurse, who came in to work with us as an operator, and she says the supervisor, the LED, has made her cry twice from the pressure, because they pressure us at work, and it shouldn't be like that. I tell her: why do you let them? That's why they treat me like a rebel."

Why this is the fight of workers throughout Latin America

The connection these workers have drawn is not just sentimental solidarity. It is a recognition that the same process is unfolding across borders.

Fain has for three years promoted the conversion of auto plants to military production under the World War II slogan of the "Arsenal of Democracy." One Silao worker directly expressed concerns whether their plant is being discussed as a war production site. The arrangement during World War II meant that, in exchange for a dues check-off, the UAW bureaucracy under Walter Reuther policed the shop floor for the war economy.

In 1941, moreover, the Teamsters bureaucracy actively instigated the Smith Act prosecution that jailed 18 leaders of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and Minneapolis Teamsters Local 544, which opposed the entry of the United States into the war. A union apparatus collaborating in the imprisonment of anti-war socialists is not a hypothetical. It is the precedent Fain is reviving. The threat against Lehman and the cell holding Bogdan Syrotiuk are two expressions of one policy.

In Mexico, the mechanism takes a different form. The "independent" unions promoted since 2019 have been built through the USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism, which the US Department of Labor describes without embarrassment as giving Washington "unprecedented leverage" so that American business "can compete fairly." Silao was the first case brought under it. These structures were never intended to organize Mexican workers against GM or the old corrupt union apparatus of the CTM. They were built to police the North American supply chain on behalf of US capital, with the AFL-CIO apparatus as intermediary—the same corporatist function Fain performs in Detroit.

Meanwhile, Latin America is being converted into an active front of the world war. The US is carrying out military operations against Venezuela, tightening the siege of Cuba, and expanding CIA and Pentagon operations across Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and other countries. Most recently, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service claimed that a Western intelligence service, working with Kiev, is preparing to plant captured Russian weapons in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela and manufacture audio and video "evidence" that Moscow is arming the cartels. Whatever the provenance of this specific claim, the pretexts for military intervention in Mexico are being assembled in plain view.

Workers cannot answer any of this through a union apparatus or government beholden to corporations and imperialism. We urge autoworkers throughout Mexico to take up the Silao workers' appeal to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies and united internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees: join the international fight to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, demand Jensen's removal from the UAW payroll and support Will Lehman's campaign!

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