

In rebellion against “independent” union, VW workers in Puebla, Mexico reject second sellout deal

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On October 15, workers at the Volkswagen assembly complex in Puebla, Mexico voted 3,135 to 2,452 to reject the contract that the Independent Union of Volkswagen Workers (SITIAVW) had negotiated with the company. They chose the “strike” option on a ballot that offered only that or acceptance. It was their second rejection in five weeks.

The union tried to sell the deal based on a promise to rehire the 611 workers laid off in late August, when VW eliminated the third shift on the Jetta and Tiguan lines. The promise is worthless, and workers effectively returned a vote of no confidence in the union apparatus.

SITIAVW General Secretary Hugo Tlalpan Luna has since admitted that the agreement provides only for a “gradual return” of fired workers beginning in April or May 2027, tied to the start of Golf production. Meanwhile, the layoffs continue. Tlalpan reports 829 departures this year, and Taos production will be cut from two shifts to one in November. As a result, more than 3,000 workers have lost their jobs at suppliers in Puebla.

The wage offer was a cut in disguise. The 3.8 percent direct raise for 2026 was lower than the 4.3 percent workers rejected in September and barely above the 3.45 percent annual inflation reported for September. The 3.5 percent for 2027 came with a two-year term that would postpone the next wage review until 2028.

The strike notice expires Thursday at 11 a.m. On Tuesday, October 21, VW is pulling technicians off the line for “informational meetings” in Building 25. Workers told *La Jornada de Oriente* that these will be “psychological pressure.” They noted that the plant has Saturday overtime scheduled for the rest of this year and much of next. *Diario Cambio* reports that VW called its meetings to suppress the strike because workers “no longer trust” the Tlalpan leadership.

The vote at VW is part of a growing rebellion against the union apparatuses and the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum and her Morena party. On October 14, workers

at the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) voted down a wage deal backed by their union and defended by the Sheinbaum administration, after a national march they had called independently of the union. In turn, these struggles form part of an international upsurge of the working class and youth across the Americas, Europe and beyond.

This is the sixth strike deadline since August at Volkswagen. Each time, the union has extended the deadline or brought back a sellout tentative agreement. Tlalpan now speaks of requesting a sixth extension and drafting a “third agreement.” He recalled that under his predecessor, a deal “was accepted on the third consultation.” The union’s legal representative, Arturo Blázquez, stressed that the law sets “no limit” on extensions.

The leadership has openly attacked the vote. Press secretary Hugo Zenteno blamed “disinformation” spread “with full malice” by people who “do not belong to the institution.” Tlalpan denounced “external” critics for “trying to pull water to their own mill.” While it is unclear who was the target of these claims, the *World Socialist Web Site* called on VW workers on October 3 to reject the deal and to place no trust in the union’s rehiring promise because workers have no organization of their own to enforce it.

Zenteno even endorsed the company’s line: “Every time there’s a review they tell us the company is sick. Today it seems true.”

In a desperate attempt to forestall a strike, the union is brandishing the strike deadline as a threat against the workers. It has assigned mandatory picket duty for every gate through November 8, under threat of sanctions and has said nothing about strike pay.

In 2024, the SITIAVW told workers it had no money for a strike, blaming a 73-million-peso embezzlement by the previous leadership. Before the vote, messages circulated on Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups warning workers that a strike would mean two months without wages. A leadership that is hostile to the vote and offers no strike pay

is preparing to isolate any struggle, hanging workers out to dry on the picket lines.

Who pays for the crisis?

VW calls the rejected deal its “greatest viable effort” and says it will not avoid a strike if that means “putting at risk the future” of the plant. Tlalpan himself admits that the technicians’ payroll is 4 percent of manufacturing costs.

The crisis is not falling on everyone equally. VW CEO Oliver Blume received €7.42 million in 2025, including pension contributions. That is equal to roughly 1,000 years of the average Puebla VW worker’s wages. In June, VW paid €2.6 billion in dividends. Porsche SE, the holding company of the billionaire Porsche and Piëch families, distributed €462 million.

Light vehicle production in Mexico fell 15.1 percent in September and exports 11.9 percent, primarily due to pressure from US tariffs. On October 14, the government responded by eliminating the 10 percent tariff on imported parts for assemblers for five years. It is cutting the corporations’ costs, while the Labor Ministry and the federal labor registry “accompany” contract talks to secure an agreement. At the IMSS, Sheinbaum insisted that any new offer must stay within what is “possible.” The 2027 budget allots more to servicing the public debt than to health care. Facing trade war, war in the Middle East and oil prices above \$100 a barrel, the Mexican ruling class has reached a breaking point. To remain “competitive,” it intends to make workers pay through austerity and the intensified exploitation of labor.

The response by the Morena administration to every industrial struggle has been to work with the union bureaucracy to suppress it and impose the demands of the corporate-financial oligarchy. The key lesson workers must draw is that they cannot respond to the threat to their livelihoods from trade war, US imperialism, and technological changes by aligning with “their own” government and ruling class.

An international struggle

Volkswagen workers in Puebla must instead turn to their class brothers across Mexico and internationally. They face the same struggle against the same corporations as their co-

workers worldwide. In Germany, the IG Metall union and its works council representatives voted for 50,000 more job cuts at VW in September. VW has since terminated 10 of 13 collective agreements, and Blume is demanding longer hours without pay. IG Metall shop stewards at Mercedes have warned their own executive of growing resistance on the shop floor. In the United States, auto parts workers at Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan rejected three sellout contracts from the United Auto Workers (UAW) this year.

The VW Action Committee in Germany, part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), has proposed a program to defend every job and break the control of the union apparatus. It wrote:

The fight against global corporations that pursue an international strategy cannot be won within a national framework. Every concession by the unions in one country encourages the corporations to intensify their attacks worldwide.

VW workers in Puebla should form rank-and-file committees in every department and shift, independent of the SITIAVW, the state labor authorities and every capitalist party. Their delegates should be elected in open assemblies held outside the plant. These committees should take control of the struggle and of any strike, oppose any extension or third deal imposed over the vote, and build their own strike fund through appeals to workers in Mexico and internationally.

Demands must be based on what workers need, not on what VW, the government and the union declare “possible.” They should include the immediate reinstatement of those laid off at the plant and at suppliers, no layoffs on the Taos line, wage increases well above inflation with annual reviews, and protection for every worker against reprisals. The committees should reach out directly to workers at the suppliers, at Audi in San José Chiapa, at the IMSS and at VW plants in Germany and the United States. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges VW workers who want to build these committees to contact us.



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