

Mexican government and VW's “independent” union seek to impose third tentative agreement after six strike deadlines

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Near midnight on October 21, hours before the sixth strike deadline since August, Volkswagen and the Independent Union of Volkswagen Workers (SITIAVW) announced a third tentative agreement for the 6,200 workers at the company's plant in Puebla, Mexico. Workers will vote on October 28, and the strike deadline has been extended to 11 a.m. on October 29.

The day after the settlement announcement, the federal Labor Ministry (STPS) and the Federal Center for Labor Conciliation and Registration (CFCRL) issued a joint statement saying they had “permanently accompanied” the talks and “recognize the willingness shown by Volkswagen de México and the SITIAVW to prioritize dialogue and conciliation... with respect for the rights of working people.”

Workers voted down the first agreement on September 11 by 73 percent. They rejected the second on October 15 by 56 percent, choosing the “strike” option on the ballot. In praising “dialogue,” the Sheinbaum government is congratulating the union for refusing to abide by the results and holding vote after vote until the workers give the answer the company wants.

The meaning of “respect for the rights of working people” is spelled out in the new deal. It offers 4.4 percent on base wages, a 0.25 percent increase to the savings fund and a one-time payment of 12,000 pesos (US\$640). The rehiring of the 611 workers laid off in August, the centerpiece of the union's sales pitch for the second deal, has disappeared. VW has called the agreement “definitive” and ruled out a “fourth round” of talks.

Regardless of what the deal states, the real terms were spelled out at mandatory company meetings on October 20. According to workers' accounts reported by *La Jornada de Oriente*, management presented plans to freeze wages “until at least 2030,” as part of a global

freeze for some 660,000 VW employees.

Management reportedly warned that a strike would endanger the planned production of the Golf, which workers took as a threat against any reinstatement of the 611 workers fired. VW is also preparing to move part of Taos production to Brazil and Argentina. The deal on offer would be the first year of a four-year freeze.

The third vote cannot be interpreted as only a trade union matter. It is part of a state operation. The Morena government is standing with a German transnational and its union partners to impose a contract that workers have rejected twice.

The CFCRL is a creation of the 2019 labor reform, which Morena sold as “union democratization.” However, the reform was adopted under pressure from Washington during the renegotiation of the North American trade pact. Its purpose was to contain a brewing rebellion against the old CTM gangster unions and transnational corporations that threatened to spread across the border. A few months before its adoption, tens of thousands of auto parts workers in Matamoros launched wildcat strikes to overthrow the unions and demand a 100 percent wage increase.

Designed by the US and Canadian government, the Mexican labor reform implemented contract votes that helped promote “independent” unions sponsored and trained by the American, Canadian and European union bureaucracies as a means of channeling the opposition and potential strikes back under state control.

The reform's rules show this plainly. Article 927 of the Federal Labor Law allows the union to extend the strike deadline whenever workers reject an agreement, and the parties can keep extending “by common agreement.” The SITIAVW's lawyer, Arturo Blázquez, boasted last week that the law sets “no limit” on extensions.

After workers chose “strike” on October 15, the SITIAVW declined to raise the red-and-black strike flags. Its press secretary blamed the result on “disinformation.” This time, with CFCRL authorization, workers will not even sign for receipt of the agreement, and VW has announced it will “communicate directly” with workers before the vote.

Union leader Hugo Tlalpan, who admits that the technicians’ payroll is 4 percent of manufacturing costs, has been accused by workers who spoke with *Herlado de Puebla* of forming “shock troops” to intimidate and attack workers who question his decisions. “He acts like a mafia boss and is always accompanied by bodyguards.”

The SITIAVW is the product of the same operation. It belongs to a federation founded in 2018 with funding from Germany’s IG Metall union and the “global union” IndustriALL. In Germany, IG Metall representatives on VW’s supervisory board voted in September for 50,000 job cuts. The same wage freeze being presented in Puebla is now on the table there.

The VW struggle is part of a movement spreading across the country. On October 1, IMSS health workers forced their way into their union’s headquarters in Mexico City and marched in at least 17 states. On October 14, they voted down a wage deal that Sheinbaum had defended. The union and the government have since imposed an 8 percent package without a new vote, with only 4 percent on base pay. Workers have called a national march for October 30.

Students at UNAM preparatory schools 1 and 8, FES Aragón and UAM Iztapalapa, have gone on strike over violence and crumbling facilities. On October 21—22, hundreds of truckers blocked six highways in Puebla after the murder of a regional leader of their association, AMOTAC, demanding security on the roads.

The government’s response to each struggle has been identical: “dialogue tables” at the Interior Ministry, police on the streets and a union apparatus to enforce the result. Workers’ “no” votes have become votes of no confidence in Morena’s “transformation.”

The Mexican ruling class is imposing these terms because of the deepening crisis of its position within world capitalism. Light vehicle production fell 15.1 percent in September and exports 11.9 percent under US tariffs. On July 1, Washington refused to extend the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, leaving Mexico subject to annual reviews until 2036. Mexico has lined up behind Washington’s trade war against China, imposing tariffs of up to 50 percent on 1,463 tariff lines since January.

The government’s answer has been to cut costs for corporations. On October 14, it eliminated the 10 percent tariff on imported parts for automakers for five years, a direct subsidy to VW and its competitors. Sheinbaum’s 2027 budget allocates 1.575 trillion pesos, 15 percent of federal spending, to servicing the public debt, more than it spends on healthcare. The International Monetary Fund has demanded faster fiscal consolidation.

Morena is not a genuine left government working to defend “national sovereignty” from Trump and his neocolonial ambitions. It is the political representative of a ruling class subservient to US imperialism and committed to making workers pay for the trade war and the debt. Above all else, the priority for Sheinbaum is safeguarding Mexico’s “competitiveness” based on providing cheap labor to US corporations.

What is needed

VW workers should vote no on October 28. But a third rejection will only be met with new maneuvers unless workers build their own organization. The answer is not a “more independent” union certified by the same state.

Workers should form rank-and-file committees in every department and shift, independent of the SITIAVW, the STPS and CFCRL, and every capitalist party. Delegates should be elected in open assemblies outside the plant. These committees should take control of any strike and build their own strike fund. They should advance non-negotiable demands for the reinstatement of the 611, wages indexed to inflation, a major wage increase and a freeze not on wages but on firings.

This struggle against the Morena government and the corporations it serves is a political struggle.

The committees should link up with IMSS workers, the truckers, autoworkers at Audi, suppliers and other car assembly factories and VW workers in Germany facing the same freeze, through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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