“Form rank-and-file committees”: GM autoworkers back November 9 march by Mexican healthcare workers

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As workers of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) marched in Mexico City on Monday against their union leadership and the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum, autoworkers at General Motors’ plant in Silao, Guanajuato, sent messages of support to the *World Socialist Web Site* calling on health workers to break free of the union and join forces with workers in other industries.

“Health workers, I address you respectfully and with great admiration for your struggle, which belongs to all of us,” said Paula, a GM Silao worker. “It is time to form rank-and-file committees… You must repudiate that corrupt union.”

Hundreds of active and retired healthcare workers marched from the Siglo XXI National Medical Center to the Zócalo, blocking traffic as they set off. Contingents came from Puebla, Guadalajara and other states. Their demands include a 10 percent raise on the base wage, full staffing, medicines and supplies, the restoration of the defined-benefit pension and the removal of Rafael Olivos, secretary general of the National Union of Social Security Workers (SNTSS).

Earlier that morning, six workers blocked Constitución Avenue in Monterrey for an hour and a half in front of IMSS Gynecology and Obstetrics Hospital No. 23. In both cities, workers repeatedly chanted for an “extraordinary congress” to remove Olivos.

The rebellion erupted on October 1, when workers stormed the SNTSS headquarters over a 2.9 percent raise on the base wage signed by the union. On October 14 they voted it down. A week later, IMSS director Zoé Robledo announced an “8 percent” increase, of which only 4 percent goes to the base wage on which pensions are calculated, and Olivos declared the matter closed without a new vote. The Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (CFCRL), created by the ruling Morena party’s 2019 labor reform, registered the agreement on October 28. Sheinbaum stated: “The union has to cooperate.”

Five weeks on, the rank-and-file movement, now divided into several wings, still directs its efforts toward the union statutes and the state: petitions to the Interior Ministry, lawsuits, a complaint to the Anticorruption Ministry and signatures toward the two-thirds threshold Olivos himself set for his removal.

The union and the state, meanwhile, are operating as one apparatus to crush resistance from below. On November 3, 120 national and section officials, including all 37 section secretaries general, signed a paid insert in *Reforma* backing Olivos and rejecting any removal “outside the procedures established in our statutes.”

Section leaderships are now retaking the union offices that workers occupied in October. In Torreón, Morelia, Toluca and Jalisco, groups brought in by the leadership removed the occupiers, who now face criminal complaints for “dispossession.” In Chihuahua, the section kept members’ savings fund frozen until protesters left the building. On Monday, while most Puebla workers were in Mexico City, followers of the Section 1 leadership tried to force their way into the occupied offices there, in what workers denounced as a shock-group intrusion. As of November 5, workers still held union buildings in Mexico City, Puebla, Monterrey, Mérida, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro and Lázaro Cárdenas.

The IMSS has joined in the repression. The movement’s spokeswoman, Erika Cureño, was summoned before the institute’s Labor Relations Office on Monday for “damaging the institutional image” by denouncing shortages. Workers rallied at the union’s Pestalozzi offices in her defense.

The demand for an extraordinary congress is legitimate. But the leadership has answered it with evictions, criminal complaints and disciplinary summonses. In Puebla, the section leadership refuses to convene a congress for “a few workers.” The union apparatus has become a central obstacle to the workers’ struggle. The way forward is the one the autoworkers point to: rank-and-file committees in every hospital and clinic, independent of the SNTSS, the state and all the capitalist parties, uniting with autoworkers and other sections of workers in Mexico and internationally.

“Your struggle is not yours alone”

Paula speaks from experience. She was a member of Generando Movimiento, the rank-and-file group formed at GM Silao in 2019 to oppose the pro-company union of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). GM fired several of its leading members. When workers voted out the CTM contract in 2021, the company, the

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Morena government, the US Labor Department and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center intervened to channel the revolt behind a new "independent" union, SINTTIA, built around a layer of workers more amenable to management. Generando Movimiento was sidelined, and SINTTIA was certified in 2022.

Her message to health workers continued:

> Your union leaders should not decide for everyone. How is it possible that one bad leader wants to impose his rules? Your conditions will not change as long as a bad union represents you.
>
> It is time to form rank-and-file committees, made up of the health workers themselves: those who live with the shortages in the medical units, who have miserable wages, endless shifts, no supplies and no medicines…
>
> Union freedom does not exist. And your struggle is not yours alone; it belongs to everyone. That is why I support your struggle… Health workers, unstoppable, tireless workers: you have all my support. Keep going. Form your rank-and-file committees.

"Union freedom does not exist" is a verdict on the "union democratization" Morena promised in 2019. The machinery that certified SINTTIA registered the IMSS deal no one voted for.

For autoworkers, the IMSS is not an abstraction. A GM assembly worker in Silao, who asked to remain anonymous, described what happens when a co-worker is injured on the line: "They go to the IMSS, to Social Security, and since there are no doctors, they aren't seen, and the illness keeps developing more and more. When they finally want to fix it, there's no turning back."

His daughter, a nursing graduate interning at the IMSS, earns roughly what a GM Silao worker earns. She had to buy her own pulse oximeter and blood-pressure monitor, he said, "because there aren't any at the Seguro, and the few there are don't work… With the little there is, they want you to perform miracles."

Paula forwarded a post, widely shared online, by a doctor who resigned from the IMSS despite holding a permanent post. The doctor described a four-year-old girl who arrived during a night shift with probable brain inflammation after a fall:

> There were no drugs to sedate her, and no fentanyl for her pain. They told me to give her only paracetamol for an intubation. There weren't even tubes her size. There was nothing in the crash cart… no CT scan available… If you want to be angry with someone, you know who to turn to: those people in the government who don't go to the IMSS or a public hospital when they get sick, those people who cut the health budget.

Luis Daniel Prieto, a street vendor in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, has no social security at all, like millions of informal workers. He denounced Morena for failing to provide the staff and supplies the IMSS needs: "Governments that call themselves left-wing only tighten the belt on the workers of the IMSS but do not provide the resources needed." He added: "I hope that all of us, not only the Social Security workers, unite as a working class… It is necessary to have a revolutionary socialist leadership."

A global struggle

The shortages are a political decision. The 2027 budget allocates 2.9 percent of GDP to health, less than half the 6 percent recommended by the Pan American Health Organization, while debt service absorbs about 4 percent and the Navy's budget rises by about 20 percent in real terms. The Sheinbaum government is making workers pay for the crisis of Mexican and world capitalism, as the ruling classes everywhere turn to war, austerity and authoritarian rule.

Workers are resisting across the country and the world. On the day of the IMSS march, National Electoral Institute workers held a national one-day stoppage for a wage floor of two minimum wages. Teachers, truckers and Volkswagen workers in Puebla have all clashed with the government and the union apparatus this year. Mass protests have swept France, and US autoworkers have boycotted the UAW leadership elections.

What workers in auto plants and other sectors have expressed must be given organized form. Rank-and-file committees of IMSS workers, with delegates elected in workplace assemblies and subject to recall, could defend every worker targeted by the union or management and prepare a national strike from below, with emergency care maintained under workers' control. Linked with autoworkers, teachers and truckers, and with workers internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), they would give the fight for healthcare the strength of the whole working class.

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