

NOVEMBER 28TH NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION:
GENERAL MOTORS NOMINATED FOR “CORPORATE EXCELLENCE”
AWARD AS DISABLED GM WORKERS AND FAMILIES STARVE

National protests at GM Headquarters in Detroit and U.S. State Dept. in D.C. on Wednesday, Nov. 28th

The President of the Association of Injured and Ex-Workers of General Motors Colombia (ASOTRECOL), Jorge Parra, sewed his mouth shut on November 20th and is on hunger strike. Jorge, alongside local unions, community organizations, and religious leaders, demands that GM Detroit negotiate with ASOTRECOL. Jorge’s fellow workers continue their 15-month-long tent occupation outside the U.S. embassy in Bogotá, Colombia.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is considering awarding General Motors the “Award for Corporate Excellence,” citing GM’s “exemplary labor practices” and its overall “corporate social responsibility.” In 2006 the Bush administration granted the award to Colmotores, the GM plant located in Bogotá, Colombia—the same plant responsible for destroying the lives of the ASOTRECOL workers.

SHAME ON GM!

- GM Colombia (Colmotores), the most profitable GM plant in Latin America, fired over 200 workers who suffered work-related injuries and diseases, including spinal fractures and cancer.
- GM bought off government inspectors, doctors, lawyers, and judges to hide evidence of poor working conditions and worker injuries. They falsified documents and destroyed patients’ medical histories.
- GM refuses to recognize the workers’ occupational injuries and provide the fired workers with adequate medical compensation and pensions. Taking into account lost wages, pensions, and medical care, labor lawyers estimate a just settlement to be \$24 million. In August 2012 Colmotores offered just \$5,000 in total compensation to 12 workers. One spinal surgery alone costs over \$50,000.

THE WORKERS’ DEMANDS:

- GM Detroit must negotiate immediately with ASOTRECOL
- Recognize workers’ injuries as occupational and provide adequate medical care
- Pay pensions for disabled workers and rehire those still able to work
- Compensate workers for economic damage, including lost wages and homes
- Recognize ASOTRECOL as a GM union
- U.S. enforcement of the Labor Action Plan, which outlines basic protections for workers within the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement

WHY: Solidarity Protest for Hunger Strikers demanding negotiations with GM-Detroit

WHEN: 3:30-5pm; Wednesday, November 28th (Detroit)

WHERE: GM Headquarters, 400 Renaissance Center Drive, Detroit.

U.S. State Dept., Ben Franklin RM, Washington D.C.

MAKE A FINANCIAL DONATION:

ASOTRECOL workers and their families lack adequate food, shelter, and medical care. Send a donation check payable to “Wellspring UCC” with “Colombia relief” on the memo line. Mailing address: Wellspring UCC, Box 508, Centreville, VA 20122.

CONTACT:

For Spanish: Jorge Parra (ASOTRECOL), jjorgealberto@hotmail.com; 540-220-8257.

For English/Spanish: Diana Sierra (Graduate Employees’ Organization), dcarolina1994@gmail.com, 607-857-5677, or Kevin Young, kyoung1984@gmail.com, 607-857-5677.

Association of Injured and Ex-Workers of General Motors Colombia, President's Statement:

We are simple workers and peaceful people. We are always ready to dialogue. We are engaging in these actions because of the lack of serious commitment on the part of General Motors in the more than 470 days we have spent seeking justice. We are not asking for charity, we are demanding that The General Motors Corporation engage with us to right its wrongs.

1. Because of the multiple occasions that we have suspended the hunger strike without achieving a resolution, we will not lift the hunger strike until there is a final and just resolution to our demands.
2. Due to the multiple times that General Motors Colmotores has dismissed the validity of our claims and attacked our motives, we demand that this situation be resolved directly with the parent company, General Motors, not with Colmotores, nor in Colombia.
3. ASOTRECOL is the sole representative of the injured and fired workers of GM Colmotores. Suggestions that GM engage with us individually are unacceptable. We will continue to engage in good faith efforts to solve this in a collective manner. General Motors Colmotores says that we are "radical." If defending our rights and protecting the well being of our children and our families makes us "radicals," then we are radicals. We are sure that workers in the United States and around the world would not tolerate the injustices which we have experienced working at GM Colmotores. We are ready to release documented evidence of the abuses we received from GM Colmotores to the media in the United States and Colombia. These documents will show that everything we are saying is true and that all of our denouncements are valid.

We are grateful to the people of the United States, and all the leaders of faith, for the unwavering support they have given us and we hope to have this same support as we begin this hunger strike. We are grateful to the UAW and the AFL-CIO for their efforts to help us win justice, and ask for their direct intervention in assisting us to reach a just resolution.

We hold General Motors directly responsible for the consequences of this hunger strike. We will give our lives if necessary, because we will no longer permit our children to go hungry.

Jorge Parra,
President, ASOTRECOL
[540-220-8257](tel:540-220-8257)
jjorgealberto@hotmail.com



ASOTRECOL President and Hunger Striker, Jorge Parra, with lips sewn shut. Nov. 20th

SUPPORT DISABLED GM HUNGER STRIKERS FROM HOME

1. Make a Donation to GM Hunger Strikers and their Families:

- **Via Mail:**
 - Send check to "Wellspring UCC" with "Colombia relief" on the memo line. The mailing address is Wellspring UCC, Box 508, Centreville VA 20122.
- **Via Paypal:**
 - Visit: www.wellspringucc.org Be sure to write "Colombia relief" on the message subject line. A fee (less than 3%) is taken out of online donations from a bank card, with a fee closer to 6% for credit cards. Once a week these funds will be sent to the workers.

2. Post on Twitter:

- @GM - General Motors
- @USEmbassyBogota
- @BarackObama
- @JuanManSantos - Colombian President

3. Post on Facebook:

- GM: <http://www.facebook.com/generalmotors>
- US Embassy in Bogota: <http://www.facebook.com/usdos.colombia>
- Colombian Consulate NY: <http://www.facebook.com/consuladodecolombiany>
- GM Colombia Hunger Strikers:
http://www.facebook.com/groups/116719295080402/346690728749923/?ref=notif¬if_t=group_activity

4. Sign Petition:

Change.org:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/gm-resolve-situation-of-workers-dismissed-for-occupational-injuries>

5. Send Postcards to General Motors CEO Dan Akerson:

- <http://s3.amazonaws.com/asot-hung/gm-postcards-4.pdf>
- <http://s3.amazonaws.com/asot-hung/gm-postcards-3.pdf>



General Motors CEO Daniel Akerson received a salary of \$7.7 million in 2011. The company made a record-high profit of \$7.6 billion.



ASOTRECOL President and Hunger Striker, Jorge Parra, with lips sewn shut. Nov. 20th

Destroying Lives: GM Attacks Workers' Rights Here and Abroad

1. Why a year-long tent occupation outside the U.S. embassy?

Since August 2011, members of the Association of Injured and Ex-Workers of General Motors Colombia (ASOTRECOL) have lived in tents in front of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota to voice their demands. In bailing out GM in 2008-09, the U.S. government became a major investor. General Motors CEO Daniel Akerson received a salary of \$7.7 million in 2011. The company made a record-high profit of \$7.6 billion.¹ As of March 21, 2012, the U.S. government owned 32 percent of the company. Yet the Bush and Obama administrations have declined to use this leverage to force GM to respect workers' rights. Instead, the multi-trillion-dollar bailouts of banks and corporations like GM saved the super-wealthy "1 percent" who were responsible for creating the economic crisis.

Like the bank bailouts, the auto industry bailout could have been conducted in a way that would solve some of our country's fundamental problems. But the U.S. government neglected to use its leverage to restructure the auto industry to serve human needs. The bailout could have involved re-orienting the industry to produce high-speed rail and other mass transit infrastructure that this country lacks. It could have put workers themselves in charge of production. But it did neither. Instead, it perpetuated our inefficient and environmentally destructive dependence on automobiles and asphalt and rescued the criminals who sit in the board rooms.

The United States also provides hundreds of millions of dollars in annual military aid to the Colombian government. The Colombian military and the right-wing death squads that are linked to it use that aid to murder and terrorize unionists, peasants, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous peoples. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) documented 29 murders of trade unionists, 10 attempted murders, and 342 death threats in 2011. Private security firms have harassed and spied on ASOTRECOL. By ignoring ASOTRECOL's demands for justice, General Motors and the U.S. government perpetuate the violent conditions that make Colombia the most dangerous country in the world for labor organizers. A 2005 report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions gives an overview of these conditions:

The state ministries and bodies responsible for social policy have been weakened, reformed or dismantled ... Workers have been sacked or given less secure terms of employment in both the private and public sectors. Both sectors are being restructured using laws that promote labour flexibility and enable employers to evade clear obligations...

It is a complex and sometimes impossible task to form trade unions, sign collective agreements or organise strikes...People wanting to set up a union are dismissed, harassed or even threatened with death...Impunity is the norm for those who violate labour rights (including



“The only thing the company has done is disgrace our lives, and the only thing they do now is throw money at a bunch of judges, buy a bunch of people off, to protect the grand name of GM, which in reality is not that grand of a name, in reality GM only tries to take advantage of people, take our country's resources, to leave us all disabled. That's the great name of GM.”

Manuel Ospina Contreras, hunger striker

¹ <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/people/person.asp?personId=93549&ticker=GM:US;>
[http://money.cnn.com/2012/02/16/news/companies/gm_earnings/index.htm.](http://money.cnn.com/2012/02/16/news/companies/gm_earnings/index.htm)

*murdering of unions leaders and members), whilst the full force of the law is brought to bear on workers, even where they are acting in full compliance with it. There are also cases of members of the judiciary being put under pressure when doing their job and defending rights acquired by workers.*²

As a result, just 5 percent of the economically active population belongs to trade unions, and only 1 percent of Colombian workers are covered by a collective bargaining agreement—even worse than in the United States.³

2. How will the so-called “Free-Trade Agreement” between the U.S. and Colombia affect these countries’ workers?

The U.S. and Colombian governments recently signed a “free-trade” agreement, or FTA. In response to criticisms, the governments accompanied the FTA with a “Labor Action Plan” that would allegedly defend the rights of workers. But as the struggle of the GM workers in Colombia suggests, there is much reason to be skeptical. The very logic of free-trade agreements like NAFTA and the Colombia FTA runs counter to the rights of workers and the public interest. The goal is to expand corporations’ access to cheap labor, natural resources, and markets while freeing them from environmental laws and other regulations that protect workers and the general public.

According to Gustavo Triana of Colombia’s biggest union federation, the CUT, “Free trade is killing us as much as bullets are.” Figures from Colombia’s own Ministry of Agriculture speak to this concern. In 2004 the Ministry estimated that the full elimination of tariffs on agricultural products—required under the FTA of Colombia, though not of the United States—would reduce agricultural employment by 35 percent. The same study noted that a free-trade agreement with the United States would leave many peasant farmers with three choices: “migration to the cities or other countries (especially the United States), working in drug cultivation zones, or affiliating with illegal armed groups.” The situation in the Colombian countryside is already dire, with 1.15 percent of landowners controlling 52 percent of the land and three-quarters of the country’s rural residents, or about 11 million people, living in poverty.⁴ The FTA and the suffering of the GM workers now on hunger strike both derive from the same logic, one that prioritizes corporate profit over human needs. Only organized resistance and cross-border solidarity can stop the architects of these policies from getting their way.

*For more information and updates on the ASOTRECOL hunger strike, visit www.asotrecol.com
And <http://www.facebook.com/groups/116719295080402/>*

² <http://survey.ituc-csi.org/Colombia.html?edition=336#tabs-1>.

³ <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221646&Language=EN>.

⁴ *USA Today*, 10/4/2007; *Semana* (Bogotá), 9/25/2011;

<http://www.citizen.org/documents/colombia-fta-talking-points-april-7-2011.pdf>.