

Mass strike enters fifth day in Matamoros, Mexico

Thousands gather at mass meeting as maquiladora strike grows

Our reporters
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As new manufacturing plants join the growing strike in Matamoros, Mexico, over 70,000 workers are confronting threats of mass firings and plant closures by the employers and advancing their fight against social inequality.

Amid a media blackout by Mexican and international outlets, the ruling class has demonstrated a profound fear that the rebellion by Matamoros sweatshop workers who produce auto parts and other goods supplying the main auto companies in North America, Europe and Asia will inspire workers to take up the same fight in the rest of the industrial belt along the US-Mexico border and spill over across the North American continent and beyond.

Over the weekend, workers affiliated to the Union of Laborers and Industrial Workers of the Maquiladora Industry (SJOIIM) decided in mass assemblies and discussions on social media to walk out in defiance of the trade union and the Matamoros government controlled by the ruling National Regeneration Movement (Morena) of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

The state and city governments and trade-union officials have taken over the bargaining for the companies, ordering the strike to end and defending the maneuvers by the companies to infringe the contracts and continue extracting massive profits from the super-exploitation of the Maquiladora workers, who make on average \$9 a day.

At least five workers confirmed to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that the SJOIIM officials were intimidating workers with a shadowy statement by the Secretary of Labor of the state of Tamaulipas declaring the strikes illegal. Moreover, live feeds were shared

online of workers denouncing officials of SITPME (known as the Mendoza union) for threatening layoffs and violence if workers joined the strike.

In response, increasing numbers of workers from both unions and other smaller ones have joined the strike, with many demanding that the trade unions “get out.”

A statement voted by striking workers at the Tridonex plant on Wednesday reads, “Today, we have a unique chance that we will never have again. All workers disagree with the injustice sustained by the trade union and with the dues they take from us weekly. Today we can fight for a change, all of us together. *Let’s have no fear and not let them intimidate us.*”

Earlier this year, the AMLO administration and the employer organizations agreed to implement a 100 percent increase of the minimum wage at industrial cities along the US-Mexico border largely to feed illusions in the new government and ease class tensions. The negotiators felt at the time that trade unions and threats would suffice to force cuts to bonuses and other benefits in exchange for the raise.

When the strike began on Saturday, workers were initially demanding the 100 percent raise. In order to take up the demands and prevent the protests from escaping its control, the SJOIIM agreed to request companies a 20 percent raise and a bonus of 32,000 pesos (US\$1,700).

Workers had organized a general assembly on social media for Wednesday afternoon to get rid of the union leadership and discuss how to continue the struggle once the deadline for paying the bonus expired according to the labor contract.

The companies have responded with escalating intimidation, making clear that they will not even

consider the workers' demands. On Tuesday, the main business chamber in Mexico COPARMEX (Employers' Confederation of the Mexican Republic) threatened that if the strike continues, "maquiladoras will look for other options with cheaper labor."

On Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, dozens of workers at the Cepillos plant in Matamoros, some of whom had worked there for more than 20 years, were summarily fired for not agreeing to sign a 6 percent wage increase.

The SJOIIM then carried out a stunt before this assembly, filing a legal "strike announcement" requiring workers to wait 6 to 10 days before a strike can "officially" begin. To a question after a reporter whether a strike would actually begin, the widely loathed union leader Juan Villafuerte responded, "I don't know."

Delegations of rank-and-file workers sent for this announcement then returned to their plants to inform the other strikers about the union's decision.

"The union made the rounds for a work stoppage, but we don't trust the union because Mr. Juan Villafuerte is corrupt and, in fact, we'll ask for his resignation because we don't want him anymore. We'll either put someone else or eliminate the union forever," an Autoliv worker named Mika told the *WSWS*.

With similar sentiments, workers soon began to march from the picket lines in the thousands to the central plaza in Matamoros ahead of their planned afternoon assembly. For most, the walk took more than one hour, and, in some cases, workers decided to leave, some to guard the plants to prevent closures by management.

Later in the afternoon, workers at the plaza began reporting threats of mass layoffs and that trucks had arrived at some plants to take the equipment away. Nevertheless, the thousands of workers who gathered at the assembly pledged to continue fighting and expand their strike. One popular slogan of the strike is, "they can fire 10 or 20 of us but they can't fire all of us." Striking workers in Matamoros are setting a powerful example for workers across the border in the United States and beyond. Many have expressed their support for the Mexican workers' struggle through the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

Workers in the US and Mexico should come together to fight for "job security and good pay," said Steve, a

Fiat-Chrysler worker in Belvidere, Illinois. "Those people receive slave pay and deserve better. The reason most Mexicans try to cross the border is for a better-paying job and benefits for their families."

Similarly, Matamoros workers in contact with the *WSWS* have all expressed support for joining their struggle with their working-class brothers and sisters across North America. Expressing disgust over the announcement of mass layoffs and concessions against workers by GM in the US and Canada, Mika, the Autoliv worker, stated: "I only have one thing left to tell those workers: do not to let the company do it. Fight until the end because we all deserve a decent living."

July, a striking worker at the Easy Way plant in Matamoros, called on workers across North America to "unite and fight for what is right, nothing more than having a better future for our families. Together we can defeat all of those exploiters that have enriched themselves thanks to that enslavement that we live. In our case, we work more than 10 hours each day and Saturdays for a low salary that is not enough."

Whether it is in Mexico, the US, Canada or around the world, the decades of continued abuses and austerity overseen by bankrupt nationalist politicians and their union allies have demonstrated that workers can only defend their social and democratic rights by organizing independently of the trade unions and fighting to build an international political movement of the working class to expropriate the means of production of wealth controlled by the capitalist class and establish the United Socialist States of the Americas.

*On February 9, at 2 p.m. autoworkers will demonstrate at GM world headquarters in Detroit, Michigan to oppose the job cuts and concessions announced by the auto and parts companies. Workers from across the world can follow and support this demonstration on Facebook **here**.*



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