

Amid media blackout, workers expand strike

Matamoros, Mexico strike of over 70,000 workers enters sixth day

Alex González, Andrea Lobo
18 January 2019

Over 70,000 “maquiladora” workers from 45 factories in the US-Mexico border town of Matamoros, Mexico have entered the sixth day of their courageous struggle as more and more plants are paralyzed throughout the city.

Last night, thousands of workers marched through the city from factory to factory chanting “unity, unity,” “walk out! walk out!,” “the workers united will never be defeated” and “strike!” Workers stopped at each plant and appealed to workers changing shift to join their strike, greeting each new walkout with a loud round of cheers. The crowd grew throughout the night.

There is a sense in the ruling class that the strike may be getting out of control. Amid a complete media blackout, the hated trade unions are doing everything in their power to restrict the movement to “legal” union-led negotiations and to keep stoppages from spreading to more manufacturing complexes across the border area and internationally.

The strike at Matamoros has been completely ignored by the corporate media. There is not a single article about the Matamoros strike in any of the major Mexican or international news outlets. While devoting front-page news to anti-democratic maneuvers by the Democratic Party, the US-based *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and Mexican newspapers such as *El Universal* and *Reforma*, have nothing to say about the largest strike on the North American continent in recent years.

The strike could very soon disrupt global supply chains in the United States, Canada and Asia. Industry experts estimate that the strike has already cost the maquiladora industry \$20 million, or \$23,000 per minute. The strike is affecting major suppliers to the

“Big Three” automakers—GM, Ford and Fiat-Chrysler—as well as other manufacturers. Factories that are on strike include Autoliv, Inteva, Starkey, Edemsa, Aipsa, Cepillos, STC, Polytech, Kemet, Tyco, Parker and AFX.

The workers are sharing information through Facebook, with several pages sprouting up for workers to coordinate actions between plants and to defend workers against victimization by the unions and the companies.

There is no innocent explanation for the lack of coverage. The ruling class is terrified that the strikes will extend to other cities and link up the demands of workers everywhere for social equality. An editorial published yesterday by the state capital’s newspaper, *El Diario de Ciudad Victoria*, warns of similar unrest spreading to the 120 factories in the border town of Reynosa or to Ciudad Victoria, where over 6,000 auto parts workers at Kemet and APTIV are demanding a 30 percent raise in their current contract negotiations.

The decision to censor stories about Matamoros is aimed at keeping workers in the dark about developments that could be the turning point in the decision by millions of people around the world to take matters into their own hands by organizing actions outside of the trade unions, just as the Matamoros workers have already bravely demonstrated.

Despite the offer of small bonuses to draw them back to their posts, the maquiladora workers have refused to give in and continue to call for a 20 percent wage increase and a 32,000 peso bonus (\$1,700), as well as a reduction in their union dues from four percent to one percent and a return to the 40 hour work week. There is a growing call for a 100 percent raise to mirror the raise

that other workers across the US-Mexico border received at the beginning of the year.

Companies have thuggishly threatened workers with plant closures if the strike continues. An Autoliv auto parts worker told the WWS that companies have blocked their payment cards for bonuses and other allowances and have withheld workers' salaries for the first week of the month, even though workers were not on strike at that time.

Recognizing that workers everywhere face the same conditions and need to link up their struggles, autoworkers in the US and Canada have sent statements of support to the striking Matamoros workers and urged them to continue their strike.

The Matamoros workers have now rebelled against a second union, the Union of Workers in Maquiladora and Assembly plants (SIPTME). Yesterday, hundreds of workers from Tridonex, an auto parts manufacturer, gathered at SIPTME offices to demand that their plants join the workers who are currently on strike. Rather than face their own membership, union bureaucrats closed down their offices ahead of the arrival of the protesters, citing "security concerns." A mid-level official eventually emerged and summarily rejected any joint action with the workers affiliated with the Union of Laborers and Industrial Workers of the Maquiladora Industry (SJOIIM).

The SJOIIM is widely hated for taking four percent of workers' salaries every week while acting as nothing more than a cheap labor contractor. It's leader, Juan Villafuerte Morales, is working day and night to sabotage the strike and bring it back under the suffocating control of the union. "Negotiations between workers and the companies will continue for another 10 days and it would help very much if workers returned to their posts," said Villafuerte on Thursday.

Other forces are also seeking to limit the workers to negotiations between the companies and the SJOIIM. Labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas traveled from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua to give legal guidance to the striking workers. She met with Villafuerte yesterday to obtain the collective bargaining agreements from the union office, which have previously not been shared with the membership. At a mass rally yesterday, she told the crowd: "Fellow workers, you have to pressure, for starters your union. You cannot get rid of Villafuerte for now. You have to pressure until they

give in, Villafuerte and the companies."

Despite Prieto's support for a strike by legal means, workers must be warned: If they allow their struggle to be bought under the influence of the unions and the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), they will be isolated and defeated. Prieto's proposal that workers seek to pressure the union will restrict the true source of its power: their independent, unified action *outside of* and *against* the union-corporate alliance. Instead of turning to the union, they must turn to their working class brothers and sisters at other plants in other cities and other industries. This is the ticket to victory.

The formation of rank-and-file committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the union is the immediate order of the day. To be able to stand up to the intimidation of the companies, workers need to rely on the strength of the entire working class. They are receiving widespread support from workers in the US and Canada, who are enthusiastically watching their struggle with great interest.

We urge workers who want to link up with their class brothers and sisters across North America to contact us by email at autoworkers@wsws.org or on our Facebook page.

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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