

“Those workers are setting an example, they are starting a movement”

Canadian and US autoworkers voice support for striking maquiladora workers in Mexico

Shannon Jones
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US and Canadian autoworkers are voicing support for striking “maquiladora” workers in Matamoros, Mexico who are in rebellion against the companies and their union over low wages and sweatshop conditions. The striking workers include many employed by US and global auto parts suppliers who rely on their labor to fuel their massive profits.

An industry paper in Matamoros said the strike is costing sweatshop owners \$23,000 a minute as it continues.

News of the powerful walkout by Mexican workers is being blacked out by the North American media conglomerates. The action is producing fear in ruling circles over the possibility of workers in the US and across Mexico and North America following the lead of the Matamoros workers who are breaking out of the straitjacket imposed by the pro-corporate unions.

On Thursday a *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* reporting team visited the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck plant, one of five factories in the US and Canada targeted for closure as part of management plans to axe some 15,000 hourly and salaried jobs.

Reporters spoke to autoworkers about the Matamoros strikes as well as the February 9 demonstration at GM headquarters in Detroit called by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees against plant closings and layoffs. The demonstration has been called to promote a united fight by US, Canadian and Mexican workers in defense of jobs.

Cherie is a worker at the GM Detroit-Hamtramck plant with 15 years' seniority. When told that workers

in Matamoros, Mexico had struck and formed their own committees, independent of the corrupt official unions, she replied, “That sounds good. The UAW doesn't help us. They work for the company. If you start something like that here, I am sure a lot of people would join it.”

Speaking of the impending plant closures, she added, “The UAW acts like they are mad, but they are just waiting it out. A lot of people are transferring or retiring. They [management and the UAW] want the older ones out. Who can go back to working on the assembly line?”

“I resent the UAW taking \$75 a month out of my check. They aren't helping us a bit. They don't need it. They are looking out for themselves.”

A younger GM worker was very enthusiastic when told about the strike by Mexican workers. “I feel they are just doing what they have got to do. GM doesn't care about us. We should strike too!”

A GM worker with seven years at the company added, “They are fighting for what they believe in. It is the same thing for us. I lose money every day I work here.”

A worker with three years at GM said he would be likely laid off as a result of the closure. “It is slave work here.”

He said he was glad to hear that the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-file Committees had called for a demonstration February 9. “We need to fight back, period. They are going to stick it to us, \$15–\$16 an hour will be the top pay; and we are building \$50,000 to \$80,000 vehicles. We are the

ones that they are making them all that money.”

Another GM worker said she understood why the media and the UAW were blacking out all news about the strikes in Mexico. “They don’t want us to strike too. Those workers are setting an example. They are starting a movement. They don’t want us to know anything about it.”

In an effort to create the impression of a fait accompli, the UAW and GM management are encouraging GM workers facing plant closures in Detroit and Lordstown, Ohio to put in for transfers to other plants. Many Detroit-Hamtramck GM workers with sufficient seniority have already applied for transfers to plants as far away as Texas.

Another Detroit GM worker said, “I agree with you that there needs to be a fight against the shutdown, but workers are under a lot of pressure. Hundreds have signed away their rights and are now scheduled to work at other plants in Flint and different cities. They know that we are living from paycheck to paycheck and need to take care of our families.

“I am encouraged by the fight of the Mexican and French workers, and eventually we will need to do the same thing here.”

In a press briefing at the Automotive News World Congress Wednesday, GM CEO Mary Barra shed crocodile tears over the announced plant closings and 15,000 job cuts, but she reiterated the company’s decision to close all of the targeted plants. She boasted that the cuts would provide \$2.5 billion in cost savings for the company, money that will undoubtedly be quickly funneled into the pockets of wealthy investors.

Last week, workers at the Oshawa, Ontario factory, one of the five targeted for closure, staged a sit-down strike after hearing reports that Barra would not reconsider plans to shutter the facility. The response of the Unifor union was to step up its nationalist demagoguery, attempting to foster hostility against workers in Mexico for supposedly taking the jobs of Canadian workers.

A Canadian autoworker at one of the feeder plants supplying the GM Oshawa plant in Ontario, John, who asked that his real name not be used, said he opposed the anti-Mexican nationalism promoted by Unifor. He said of Mexican workers, “They are *not* our enemy. We support all autoworkers.”

“We are constantly lied to and held at bay by our

union too,” he continued. “This storm in Mexico was inevitable.

“It’s brutal that these corporations don’t even hide how much they have made on the backs of their workers, yet they cry poor in the same breath! It’s time for it to change, for sure, and Mexico has set the stage for that change. Bravo.”

Reporters for the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* also spoke with auto parts workers at French-based auto parts supplier Faurecia in Saline, Michigan about uniting the struggles of all autoworkers. Workers at Faurecia have widely shared articles exposing the sweatshop conditions in the auto parts industry.

When WSWS reporters told Dante that the Mexican workers had kicked out their union and elected their own committees, he replied, “Good. Can we kick ours out?”

Jamal, another Faurecia worker said, “Good for them! It’s also bad here. It’s the same thing. You can’t use the bathroom without letting somebody know.

“We work seven days a week, 12 hours. You can’t miss a day or you’re fired.”

Sally said to the Matamoros workers, “We need to unite! Stay strong.”

Mark said, “70,000? Damn, that’s a lot! We need to unite with the Mexican workers to become one. That would be good. I don’t like the union either. It’s the exact same as what they are dealing with in Mexico.”

When asked what he thought about the anti-Mexican rhetoric by the UAW and Trump, Mark said: “The Hispanics in the US just come here to work, not to do harm.”



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