

Workers call for election of committees

# Auto companies scared, parts run low across North America as strike grows in Matamoros, Mexico

Andrea Lobo and Alex González  
19 January 2019

The mass strike of “maquiladora” workers in the city of Matamoros, Mexico, along the US-Mexico border, has completed its first week and continues to expand in size and economic impact.

On Friday, the WSWW *Autoworker Newsletter* received reports from workers in the United States that their plants are running low on parts in a sign the Matamoros workers are having a powerful impact on the entire auto industry.

A worker at the Ford Assembly Plant at Flat Rock, Michigan, reports that the plant went down on Thursday and a one-week layoff was moved up to next week, possibly due to part shortages from Mexico.

The Ford autoworker then gave a powerful greeting: “We need to stand united and, like our brave Mexican amigos, be willing to stand up and walk out if the union ‘leadership’ fails to play hardball in the contract negotiations. God bless the brave men and women taking a stand in Mexico. I salute your bravery and pray for you and your families.”

A sense of the vast shake up across the auto industry and other sectors was given by the Maquiladoras Association of Matamoros, which reported Friday that the losses for the companies have surpassed \$100 million.

The ruling class in the US, Canada and Mexico is terrified that the strike is clogging the supply chain and inspiring the millions of workers across North America and internationally who face the same conditions.

The international corporate media has responded by continuing a virtual blackout of the strike, while a mere trickle of information can be found in the main Mexican outlets.

At the same time, employers have escalated their threats against workers of mass layoffs, plant closures and

criminal charges against “agitators,” while the city, state and federal authorities—directly implicating the Matamoros mayor and Mexican president of the ruling National Regeneration Movement (Morena)—have sent heavily armed police and soldiers of the Mexican Navy to harass the picket lines.

In spite of these vicious maneuvers, new “maquiladora” plants continued joining the strike Friday beyond the initial 45 companies affiliated to the Union of Laborers and Industrial Workers of the Maquiladora Industry (SJOIIM). These include companies like Avances Científicos, Varel International and Sliding that are affiliated to other unions. The strike now covers nearly half of the 110 maquiladoras in the city and involves more than 70,000 workers.

The strike began on Saturday when workers first learned that they were being cheated by the companies and the trade union with the non-payment of bonuses and a raise mandated in their contract. Defying the orders by the union and management to go back to work, the walkouts continued to be organized outside of the gates and on social media, demanding a 20 percent raise and a bonus of 32,000 pesos (\$1,700).

At a series of mass assemblies involving thousands from several plants at the central plaza of the city and outside of the union headquarters since Wednesday, workers have consistently pledged to continue and expand the strike across the city until their demands are met.

On Thursday night and Friday morning, thousands marched across the city chanting “Factory by Factory!” and visiting a plant at a time to appeal to shifts still working to join the strike movement.

The lack of trust and hatred toward the trade unions is

generalized among workers after decades of overseeing constant abuses by the companies. This led strikers at most plants to elect representatives among themselves to advance their demands.

However, as calls were growing for waging the struggle independently of the unions through these committees and after a mass assembly was convoked online on Wednesday to discuss this, labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas arrived at the city to address legal concerns by striking workers and, while supporting the strike, called workers to direct all appeals to the discredited unions and fed illusions in the Morena government of President Andres Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

Once the lawyer left Matamoros on Friday morning, the discussions among workers have centered along the lines of whether to develop the independent initiative of workers outside the framework of the unions or whether to continue to allow the trade union to speak for them.

Throughout Friday, the leaders of the SJOIIM and the Union of Workers in Maquiladora and Assembly Plants (SIPTME) closed their doors to workers. Jesús Mendoza, leader of the SIPTME, cowardly requested an interview with the local outlet *La Frontera* in which he denounced striking workers as “criminals,” defended the “rights of the company to decide what to do with those workers,” explaining that “the company has fired them,” and threatened picketers that “are violating the law,” noting that “we have called the authorities.”

About one hour after the interview, SITPME officials appeared at the picket lines accompanied with a unit of state police, and unsuccessfully demanded the strikers go home.

At noon, after waiting for hours at the SJOIIM offices for the reviled leader Juan Villafuerte Morales to face them, one of two representatives of a rank-and-file committee at the Parker auto parts company called on the hundreds of workers present to send “two representatives from each maquiladora to be present as a committee” at an assembly at the stairs outside of the union headquarters to discuss future actions.

Having been present at the earlier negotiations with the companies, the committee representative denounced the three union representatives of the 48 plants affiliated to the SJOIIM for “acting vulgarly and doing whatever they please,” adding that they are refusing obstinately to meet their demands. She also demanded Villafuerte to “not be a coward” and provide strikers with strike pay, prepared meals, chairs, tents and goods for their families bought with the money the union has taken through exorbitant

dues equivalent to 4 percent of their salary.

On Friday evening, workers from two other plants confirmed to the WSWs that their maquiladoras and several others have responded to the call to send two fellow workers as delegates to a committee to spend the night and hold discussions outside of the union headquarters.

The struggle by maquiladora workers in Mexico has reached a crucial crossroads and faces two distinct paths. One path, advocated by the lawyer Prieto, urges workers to continue appealing to the trade unions, which operate as thuggish cheap-labor contractors for the companies and represent the main obstacle for uniting workers from different maquiladoras in Matamoros and beyond.

Despite warnings that this is the only “legally sanctioned” path, it will lead inevitably to a sell-out compromise with the companies and the betrayal by the union to leave workers to fend for themselves once the company and state authorities counterattack against the most militant workers with a vengeance.

The alternative path is for workers at all maquiladoras to elect their two rank-and-file representatives to formalize a strike committee composed by these representatives from all maquiladoras on strike in Matamoros—to *once and for all take the struggle out of the hands of the trade unions*.

This committee must formulate and democratically vote on demands, discuss a strategy to win and formally delegate tasks to its members to advance and expand the strike. It must send appeals to maquiladora workers across the US-Mexico border and the country, to autoworkers in the United States and Canada to join their struggle.

We urge workers to contact us by email at [autoworkers@wsws.org](mailto:autoworkers@wsws.org) or our Facebook page in order to take up these crucial steps.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**