

Matamoros strike threatens to shut down North American auto industry

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The strike by 70,000 auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico is beginning to affect production at US automobile assembly plants, raising the possibility that auto production across North America could be brought to a standstill.

US workers are reporting to the *World Socialist Web Site* that management is slowing production at General Motors and Ford assembly plants as a result of the strike. Production at Ford's assembly plant in Flat Rock, Michigan will stop this week due to a shortage of parts caused by the walkout.

By courageously withholding their labor, the workers at 50 auto parts plants that have been struck in Matamoros, just south of Brownsville, Texas, could bring a major sector of the world economy to its knees.

The strike demonstrates the objective unity and class common interests of US, Canadian and Mexican workers. It is the answer of the working class to Donald Trump's racist threat to build a wall between the US and Mexico and the nationalist poison spread by the United Auto Workers and Unifor unions to make American and Canadian autoworkers think that their enemies are their Mexican brothers and sisters, not the auto bosses and the capitalist profit system.

Matamoros workers are beginning to recognize their social strength. Yesterday, thousands of workers marched from their plants to the city plaza, chanting "Bourgeoisie, get out!" The strikers have issued a social media appeal for "all Mexican workers" to join them in a national general strike, which they are calling "A Day Without Workers."

A section of yesterday's mass demonstration marched behind the banner, "The union and company kill the working class." Striking workers report that "everyone has read" the coverage on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

There are indications the strike may spread. On Friday, the parts company Aptiv fired hundreds of workers in the

border city of Reynosa for engaging in partial strikes demanding a 100 percent wage increase. The firings provoked outrage among the workers.

The eyes of a million maquiladora workers near the US-Mexico border—accounting for nearly two-thirds of Mexican exports—are on the struggle in Matamoros.

The strike shows that the international interconnectivity of the auto industry is a source of profound strength for workers everywhere. While the companies have used globalization to facilitate the hyper-exploitation of workers all over the world, the Matamoros strike demonstrates that workers at each center of production have the power to disrupt the whole machine of global for-profit production.

Tens of thousands of workers around the world are following the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of the strike, and growing numbers are sending messages of support:

- A GM worker in Oshawa, Canada said: "The companies are trying to exploit all of these workers across the border. I'm sick of it! Canada, USA and Mexico do not deserve this. We are going to follow exactly what the Mexican workers are doing. Our union isn't doing too much for us. You need to fight this fight, you need to win it. Keep your heads up."

- A Romanian worker at Autoliv—one of the companies being struck in Mexico—told the WSWs: "The conditions in Mexico are an outrage. In Romania it is no good either. We work 12 hours for 20 euros a day. The unions are the same in Romania as in Mexico. They are little bosses. In Mexico and Romania we must get better, decent conditions."

- A GM Silao worker in Guanajuato, Mexico

agreed: “We have to do something similar here in Silao. This union is not worth anything.”

- An auto parts worker in Detroit, Michigan said: “I take heart that you are reaching across these illusory national borders to your working class brothers and sisters north of you and saying ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’ We must stand together as a united global force. We will not let US-based companies hurt Mexican workers in the name of capitalism. You are our fellow workers, you just happen to live in a different country.”

These messages of class solidarity expose the lie put forward by the unions that the workers of the three countries of North America have different interests. The unions in each country tell workers they must compete with their fellow workers instead of uniting to fight their common corporate enemies. The unions say the workers in the richer countries must accept wage and benefit cuts in order to “save jobs” at home.

This strategy has been a disaster for autoworkers. Broad sections of the US and Canadian Midwest have been devastated by plant closures and union givebacks, while the salaries of Unifor and UAW bureaucrats have skyrocketed into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now GM is planning to slash another 15,000 jobs, including by shutting plants in the US and Canada that are impacted by the Mexican parts strike.

The Matamoros strike is a world event. What is taking place is open class warfare. The corporations are firing hundreds of workers, threatening their families with destitution. Companies are locking workers into the plants, blocking them from walking out with physical barriers. The Mexican Navy and state police are patrolling workers’ demonstrations with their fingers on the triggers of their assault rifles. In one week, the workers have cost the companies \$100 million in lost profits.

To date, there has not been *a single report* in the US media about the strike. The Mexican national media has ignored the strike with almost equal tenacity.

While US newspapers like the *New York Times* waste thousands of inches of column space on questions of sexual and racial identity, they censor the life or death questions facing the working class—and black out its struggles.

The ruling class—including the trade unions—cannot afford to say one word about the strike in Matamoros

because it is terrified that workers everywhere will be inspired by its example.

Here is the example the Matamoros workers are setting:

Workers are organizing independently of the trade unions and electing their own committees, with two representatives from each plant, who are tasked with coordinating the strike, sharing information between striking plants and making broader appeals to the working class as a whole. More and more, this is emerging as the central theme of the class struggle in 2019.

These are crucial first steps. But Matamoros workers must be warned that the corporations and the unions are employing a “carrot and stick” strategy to weaken their struggle. Beyond the threats of firings and violence, the companies and the main union are using appeals by careerist labor lawyers who feign support for workers while appearing with hated union bureaucrats and urging workers to “reform” the union instead of taking “independent action.”

Similar appeals to the newly elected Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has publicly pledged his support for the banks and corporations, will fall on deaf ears.

If workers follow this advice, they will surrender the initiative. Their real strength lies precisely in their independence from the unions and the capitalist political parties. The real way forward lies in appealing to their fellow maquiladora workers and their class brothers and sisters in the US and Canada.

The Matamoros strikers are proving that regardless of race or nationality, all workers are exploited by the same corporations and all speak the same language of the class struggle. The international unity of the working class is the basis for the construction of a socialist society free of war, national antagonisms and social inequality.



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