

Thousands of striking Matamoros, Mexico workers march to border to appeal to US workers

Alex González
22 January 2019

The strike by 70,000 “maquiladora” workers in Matamoros, Mexico has entered its second week and continues to intensify each day. Yesterday, workers held a protest titled “A Day Without Workers” to demonstrate that it is the working class—not the unions or the bosses—that generates all of society’s wealth.

Photos circulating on social media showed deserted factories and union bureaucrats struggling to keep production lines operating after workers put down their tools en masse. Over 50 factories have now stopped production as a result of the strike, costing corporations an estimated \$100 million over the course of one week.

After refusing to show up to work, the auto parts and electrical workers held a massive march through the city of 500,000, chanting “we will win this fight no matter what,” “the workers united will never be defeated,” and “empty plants, a day without workers!”

The strike in Matamoros, like any significant movement of the masses, is characterized by the striving for social equality. The demands of the Matamoros workers—a 20 percent wage increase, a USD\$1,700 bonus, a shorter work week, and cuts to union dues—are class issues that unite all workers regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or national origin.

In the course of their struggle, the workers are instinctively seeking to form links across irrational nation-state boundaries. The rally was originally scheduled to take place in the town square, but was redirected in the course of the march when workers decided to march to the border crossing between Matamoros, Mexico and Brownsville, Texas so they could appeal to US workers as their class allies. As they were marching near the border, many demonstrators

called on their US counterparts to join their struggle, chanting “gringos [Americans], wake up!”

Oscar, a maquiladora worker in Matamoros, told the WSWs that workers chose to march to the border “to be heard, because the government in Matamoros doesn’t care. At the bridge we have our sights set on Brownsville, Texas. This way I hope they can see us.”

A former Canadian GM autoworker told the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*: “Thank you brothers and sisters in Mexico for taking a stand for all North American workers. Unity amongst those of us who do the work is key to taking back fair wages and pursuing safer workplaces that strive for continuous improvement. The only way to fight back is to stop allowing them to put us up against each other and stand together against the corrupt unions and corporations that take and take and take from us.”

The events in Matamoros are the progressive answer to the nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism of Donald Trump and the US and Canadian trade unions. By erecting walls and fences, the ruling elites all around the world have artificially divided workers that are exploited by the same companies in different portions of the production process.

Under a globally integrated economy, workers have the power to disrupt the supply chain and threaten to shut down entire industries. The WSWs has received reports that sections of the North American auto industry have been stalled due to a shortage of auto parts produced in Matamoros. This occurs at the same time as 15,000 US and Canadian autoworkers from General Motors (GM) are fighting against planned plant closures, wage cuts, and other concessions that will funnel ever more profits into the portfolios of the

rich.

The logic of the Matamoros strike will pit the workers ever more openly against the entire political and economic system. The unions and state apparatus are consciously working to sap the independent initiative of the workers so it can be strangled and betrayed.

Yesterday, Matamoros Mayor Mario López of the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) addressed the demonstration at the city plaza for the first time since the strike began. He wholeheartedly defended the “right” of corporations to extract massive profit out of the workers and refused to state his support for the strike. He said: “I want to tell you that since this began, no one has been more concerned about labor stability but me. Matamoros needs peace and quiet. I have a responsibility to rule Matamoros. I sent some people to Mexico City, the corporate class is also worried ... Here I will not intervene because it is a fight between the workers and the companies.”

At a press conference after the rally, a reporter asked him whether or not he thought the workers’ demands were fair. He said: “We have to find balance. The thing is that if there is no agreement, the companies can leave, it has happened before. I am urging them not to leave. A corporation can say, ‘I can’t give them that.’”

When angry workers at the plaza responded by shouting, “we want justice” and “you are not supporting us,” Javier Zuniga Garcia from the Tamaulipas Miners Union, a supposed more “radical” union leader, took over the microphone to help bolster the mayor. “We are doing this to avoid a social problem that can develop here in Matamoros,” he said. “Let’s give our mayor our trust ... we give him credit for being here. We want to keep trusting in our institutions. If [union leaders] Villafuerte or Mendoza come they will have the same rights as the mayor.”

Workers should reject the lie by the politicians, the unions and the companies that “there is no money” to pay their wage increases or their bonuses. The maquiladora industry controls two-thirds of Mexico’s exports and generates billions in profits from imposing sweatshop conditions on more than a million people. These threats to shut down plants are attempts to bully the Matamoros workers into submission and make an example of them to keep the strike from spreading elsewhere. The corporate losses caused by the strike

could have already paid the bonuses demanded by the workers multiple times over.

There has not been a *single article* on the Matamoros strike in the international press—the largest strike in North America in two decades—precisely because the ruling elite is afraid that other workers will follow the example that the Matamoros workers are setting by rebelling against their trade unions and seeking the support of workers internationally. This media blackout must be overcome by the workers themselves using social media to reach their class brothers and sisters around the world, who are watching their unfolding struggle with great interest and enthusiasm.

Appeals to Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), the federal mediation process proposed by the mayor, or a “reform” of the unions proposed by labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas are all recipes for disaster.

Workers must understand that they are up against the capitalist system and that all politicians and unions—from the mayor all the way up to the president and the courts—defend the “right” of the corporations to exploit the working class.

The working class needs its own organizations of struggle that will be able to draw on the social strength of the international working class. Workers must follow the model set in some plants in Matamoros by electing rank-and-file delegates and building a new, democratic city-wide strike committee to direct the struggle and prevent the unions from strangling their cause with empty promises.

We urge workers to contact us by email at 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