

Amid growing calls by workers for an international struggle Companies, union appeal for federal intervention against strike in Matamoros

Our reporters
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After their twelfth day of strike, tens of thousands of workers in Matamoros, México, mostly auto-parts workers, continue to paralyze almost half of the 110 “maquiladora” plants in the city.

The strike has sent shockwaves across the North American auto industry. Ford and GM workers in the United States report parts shortages to the *WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter* while the US and international media are censoring the strike.

On Tuesday, the corporations sent appeals to president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) to intervene directly through both repression and by appealing to workers to accept a rotten compromise.

The Business Coordinating Council (CCE), which includes the largest employer groups in Mexico, sent a communiqué to López Obrador that read, “Appealing to your mandate and authority we ask for your intervention since this moment of instability that the labor and business sectors live in Matamoros can bring irreversible consequences for the region’s economy.” Shamelessly, the statement admits that “the contracts have a clause tying directly their bonuses with the minimum salary,” which the companies have refused to pay.

Shortly after, Juan Villafuerte, leader of the main union, the SJOIM, “seconded” this call. “It’s very, very, very necessary now, the intervention of the Labor Secretary or the president himself... People will listen to no one else,” Villafuerte said to local media.

Calls for federal intervention come as maquiladoras threaten to lay off workers and shut production, with many workers reporting mass firings. Police and Navy officials have been deployed to intimidate strikers. On Monday evening, one striker, Juan José, was violently attacked by unidentified thugs when he was returning home after participating in a mass march.

Striking workers have responded to these calculated acts of violence with enormous bravery, continuing to attend mass

assemblies and appealing for greater unity and coordination among workers for protection and for the strike to expand.

Behind the workers’ backs, the companies are carrying out secret discussions with the trade unions and government officials to suffocate the strike. The demands of the workers for a 20 percent wage increase and a \$1,700 bonus have been completely rejected by the companies even though losses from the strike have far surpassed the cost of the bonus and raise.

But in public, the political establishment has brought out labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas to appeal to workers to keep their struggle within an “acceptable” framework. Last week, Prieto explicitly told workers not to form their own independent organizations to appeal to workers internationally: “Fellow workers, you have to pressure, to begin with, the union. You cannot free yourselves from Villafuerte for now.”

Yesterday, she addressed thousands of workers at another mass assembly at the central plaza of Matamoros. While feigning sympathy for the workers and criticizing the trade unions, Prieto reproduced the union and the company’s arguments, insisting that “we need the Federal Government.” She claimed that López Obrador will defend workers’ interests, citing his increase in the minimum wage from USD \$4.5/day to \$9/day across the US-Mexico border region.

Workers who want to know what “federal intervention” in Matamoros might look like must study the example of the Oaxaca massacre in 2016, when federal police shot and killed teachers on strike in defense of public education in the town of Nochixtlán. In 2014, members of the Mexican Army kidnapped and “disappeared” 43 students protesting over school conditions in Iguala, Guerrero.

As workers now know, AMLO’s minimum wage hike was a cover set up for companies to cut bonuses and other benefits while violating contracts stipulating wage increases across the board proportionate to the 100 percent increase in

the minimum salary. Moreover, AMLO's plan for the border region cuts sales and income taxes from 40 to 20 percent and will create new pro-business incentives which will further deprive these areas of needed funding for health care, education, public transportation and other vital social services.

As an attorney, Prieto has close political ties to López Obrador's National Regeneration Movement (Morena), the governing party nationally. According to an August 20, 2018 article in the English-language *El Paso Inc.*, Prieto was working closely with Ciudad Juárez mayoral candidate and Morena member Javier González Mocken in the 2018 elections.

In a June 6, 2018 article, *915 Noticias El Paso* reported that Mocken pledged his support for the maquiladora owners, telling INDEX-AMEC, a chief association of Maquiladora owners, that the government needed to have "the intelligence to make deals with the corporations." He told the corporate representatives, "I ask you to join me in constituting part of the municipal government if the election result is in our favor." According to the report, one of the themes discussed at this meeting was the "labor climate"—code for cutting wages, bonuses and benefits to ensure corporate profits.

According to the *El Paso Inc.* report from after the election, Prieto was "behind an effort to organize a march in Downtown Juárez" to support Mocken's candidacy after he lost a close election.

Matamoros's mayor Mario López, who is also a member of Morena, helped work out the cuts to workers' bonuses and recently denounced workers' appeals for raises.

More and more workers are growing wise to the lie that AMLO and Morena will defend their interests. This conflicts entirely with their experiences in the strike so far and if workers yield the initiative to the government, they will be paving the way for disaster.

As one anonymous striking auto-parts worker told the WSWS on Tuesday, "It's all AMLO's fault!! That is why he hasn't stuck his nose out for us. And, if that is the case, I hope this conflict ends well for us workers who are the undefended class."

All offers of help and aid by pro-capitalist politicians or parties will prove to be traps for the workers. Workers can only put an end to the abusive sweatshop conditions, poverty wages, scarce social services and police-state repression by fighting to mobilize their independent strength as a class against the source of exploitation—the capitalist system.

It is critical that workers continue to develop their independent struggle to elect rank-and-file representatives, in opposition to the trade unions and all capitalist parties and their representatives, to form a new, democratic and

citywide strike committee. Workers must not allow control of these organizations to fall into the hands of union bureaucrats, Morena-linked lawyers or agents of the federal government.

Mexican workers have allies in their class brothers and sisters across North America and internationally. It is to these many millions that workers must appeal.

A GM worker from Detroit expressed his support for the Matamoros workers to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: "I am proud of them down there. They are making an impact. It will have a ripple effect. I don't care if it shuts the whole country down... It has to start somewhere and that is the perfect place for it. We need to create a path for us all to unite around the world as one.

Stephen Townsend, a former autoworker at International Harvester, wrote an open letter to the Iowa *Quad-City Times* in support of the Matamoros rebellion against the "companies and unions, who like here, act as industrial police." He states in clear-cut terms: "Workers in the US have been presented with a choice. Hang on to the nationalism that has handcuffed us or join with our brother and sisters seeking justice everywhere."

Nick, a Fiat-Chrysler worker in Detroit and a member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees, invited workers in Matamoros and across North America to join a demonstration organized by the committee at the General Motors headquarters in Detroit in opposition to the company's announced mass layoffs and plant closures.

"We stand with our courageous, working-class brothers and sisters in Mexico," Nick said. "We are holding the February 9 demonstration to help bridge the divisions and unite as a global workforce in our common cause against the exploitation, oppression and tyranny of the auto companies and their controlled-opposition union 'partners.' Let us together tear down the falsehoods of separation and the illusory borders and stand as one working class to make a better world with our efforts."



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