

Matamoros strike at a crossroads as Mexican government orders crackdown

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On Saturday, the Mexican administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his National Regeneration Movement (Morena) ordered state, city and trade-union officials to shut down the strike by tens of thousands of workers at roughly 40 “maquiladora” sweatshops owned by US and European capital at the border city of Matamoros.

After the government sub-secretary of labor failed on Friday to force workers to end the strike via threats of “unexpected consequences,” the López Obrador administration sent orders Saturday through Morena Senator Ricardo Monreal Àvila, who leads the Senate Committee of Political Coordination (Jucopo), for the Tamaulipas state police to use violence to remove picketing workers and re-open the gates of the factories.

The rebellion began with mass wildcat strikes on January 12 in defiance of the trade unions and government authorities. At that time, workers elected rank-and-file strike committees to demand a significant wage increase and a promised bonus. As it enters its third week, the strike of the maquiladora workers has reached a decisive crossroads.

With tens of thousands of workers worldwide attentively following the coverage on the *World Socialist Web Site* and amid a resurgence of workers’ struggles internationally, the Matamoros workers are setting an example for the class struggle that is unacceptable in the eyes of the Mexican, US and international ruling class. The complete blackout of the strike for two weeks by the international media unmistakably reflects these fears.

The Mexican government is threatening to use force, including by deploying patrols of Navy soldiers along the industrial parks, while companies continue to announce new plant closures and mass layoffs.

As the wildcat strikes were expanding quickly through class-based appeals among fellow workers in the city and beyond, the political establishment sent labor lawyer

Susana Prieto, who operates as a Morena activist in her home city of Ciudad Juárez, to wear down the independent initiative of workers and channel unrest behind futile appeals to López Obrador and the same trade-union bureaucracy.

On Sunday morning, however, a video was shared widely online showing both Villafuerte and the envoy of the national Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) openly giving out the orders from the federal government and Senator Monreal telling Prieto on loudspeaker that the strike had to be finalized “for the economy of the state and municipality not to collapse,” all but acknowledging that the order came directly from López Obrador.

Workers have responded with anger toward the Morena administration and are issuing renewed calls to sideline the trade union from the struggle. There is also growing skepticism regarding the role played by Prieto.

At this crossroads, workers in contact with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* are calling on their fellow workers to make the crucial conclusion that continued pleas to the trade unions and López Obrador (as suggested by Prieto) will end in disaster. In contrast, workers say all efforts should be made to appeal to the rest of the working class in Mexico and internationally.

A Matamoros worker at the US-based conglomerate Tyco International stated, “I’m angry about what is happening and at the CTM. The federal government has disappointed me. They will want to break us apart. What I take from this is that we must keep holding on.

“Do you think a strike will begin in the US? I call on workers to carry out those strikes,” he added, referring to the struggle by the US and Canadian autoworkers against plant closures and mass layoffs announced by GM. “I lived on the other side of the border in the US and I had a very different perception of the US. I have ten years living in Mexico and my perception changed and I’ve seen how the US [corporations] want to take over the wealth of all

our countries and exploit our working people.”

A worker at Kearfott, a US-based company that employs 214 workers in Matamoros and produces parts for military and commercial navigation systems, made a direct appeal to the thousands of workers at this corporation and its mother company, Astronautics, across the United States, Europe, the Asia Pacific and Australia: “We call for your support to be heard around the world as a desperate cry since our economy everywhere is in the hands of a few that are threatening our integrity with state forces. We need to be reckoned with by this influential corporation, of which we form the last and least benefited part. Thank you.”

She denounced the corporation for “never giving us any benefits and keeping us with red numbers. Now they want to hand over 790,000 pesos [USD\$41,600] among all of us and keeping 6 million pesos [USD\$316,000] for their own pocket” out of the bonus of \$1,700 per worker mandated by their contract.

“People work for years and years in this company that doesn’t pay severance to anyone. They only wait for people to die or quit to give them less money than they deserve. Most of the products that we make are electronic parts for the aerospace industry and it’s ridiculous for the manager to say that there is no solvency to pay us if we make pieces that cost USD\$80,000 each.”

The sentiment is also growing among workers across the United States to support and expand the example set by the wildcat strikes in Matamoros against the trade unions and management. An autoworker at Jeep in Toledo, Ohio, told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: “Please tell our brothers and sisters in Mexico, how very proud of them we are. They are true heroes! I wish I could have met them at the border to join their demonstration. We are with them in spirit and hope they remain strong!!!”

The trade unions and political establishments in the US, Canada and Mexico are doing everything possible for this growing solidarity and support among workers in North America not to develop into a conscious struggle for social equality across international boundaries.

In Mexico, Prieto and Villafuerte are taking increasingly desperate and evident steps to undermine the unity of the workers and thus facilitate shutting down the strike.

Without any democratic discussion or decision-making among workers, both have imposed the “legally-sanctioned” steps of ending the strike at individual plants as soon as the companies agree to the demands. These union defenders have also abandoned the calls made by

workers last week for re-hiring all workers in plants threatening closures. Workers do not want to end the strike plant by plant—they want to fight jointly with workers at all plants that are still on strike, including at Tridonex and other maquiladores that are not part of the Villafuerte union.

By Sunday evening, 14 of the 48 plants on strike in Matamoros had agreed to sign the 20 percent wage increase and USD\$1,700 bonus demanded by workers. Villafuerte and the CTM have responded by demanding workers immediately return to work, while assuring that “we hope to soon conclude this labor action” and reproducing the threats of the federal government.

At the same time, Prieto has sought to prop up the image of Villafuerte and the Federal government. On Sunday morning, she called on this recognized stooge of the companies to “promise with your hand on your heart that you won’t betray this movement.” At the same time, she has sought to distance López Obrador from Senator Monreal and requested the president to “make a direct pronouncement” to whitewash his government’s repressive orders against the Matamoros workers.

The repressive and extra-legal response by the López Obrador government reflects the turn by the Mexican ruling class further to the right and toward police-state violence, demonstrating that it has nothing to offer the working class and impoverished masses. Workers in Matamoros must take the control of the struggle from the hands of the trade union by consolidating a citywide strike committee with rank-and-file representatives, fighting for its complete independence from all capitalist parties and their operatives, and appealing to workers at other maquiladora centers along the border and in the United States, Canada and internationally.

Workers who wish to form a common international strategy should contact us by email at autoworkers@wsws.org or via our Facebook page in order to take up these crucial steps. For more information on the February 9 rally in Detroit, visit wsws.org/auto.



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