

Matamoros strike grows as Mexican ruling class warns of national strike wave

Eric London and Andrea Lobo
2 February 2019

The strike of tens of thousands of Matamoros workers spread beyond the maquiladoras this week to new industries as workers in water purification, milk production and Coca-Cola bottling walked out of their Matamoros workplaces Thursday and Friday.

Several additional auto parts maquiladoras also joined the strike at the end of the week, including at Spellman, Toyoda Gosei Rubber and Tapex. Although over a dozen plants have returned to work after the companies granted the 20 percent wage increase and \$1,700 bonus demanded by the strikers, more than 25 remain on strike, costing the mostly US-based companies a whopping \$37 million per day.

At the same time, a strike of 30,000 teachers in the state of Michoacan neared the end of its third week, with thousands of teachers blocking train tracks linking industrial hubs with the critical Pacific ports at Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacan and Manzanillo in Colima. Last Monday, thousands of teachers in Oaxaca joined the strike.

Noticieros Televisa wrote Thursday that the teachers' blockades "impact not only national industries but also their principle trading partners in Asia. In Guanajuato, the auto industry already reports an impact to supply lines."

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) attacked the teachers in a press conference Monday, ordering them to get back to work and absurdly calling them right-wing: "This has nothing to do with left-wing politics," he said. "This radicalism has everything to do with conservatism."

The Mexican ruling class is terrified of the growing strike movement.

In an article titled "The end of labor stability," Mexico's main business paper, *El Financiero*, warned on Thursday that "not in decades has Mexico been

presented with 44 strikes in only one blow." In comparison to recent weeks, the six-year presidential terms of Vicente, Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto saw only 49, 40 and 23 strikes respectively.

"As easy as one two three, the labor stability which we have maintained for decades, with hundreds of thousands of successful contract negotiations, is broken. And it won't stop there," *El Financiero* wrote, warning that the future will bring "polarization" and "a growth of the contradictions between capital and labor. It is the end of labor peace."

An Associated Press report published Friday exposes AMLO's anti-working class role in seeking to break strikes and suppress wages. According to business representatives cited in the AP article, AMLO and leaders of his Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) "actively discouraged the Matamoros union from seeking the pay increase."

It wasn't the union which demanded the wage increase, but the workers themselves, who organized independently and against the explicit threats of the union. Now, the ruling class is leaning desperately on the trade unions and their backers to block the development of a nationwide strike movement.

Milenio newspaper warned that "there is fear of a contagion in the border region, where millions hope for an increase to their incomes." The paper quotes an anonymous business leader who said, "This is without precedent. We are all involved in what here will mark what will be the future of manufacturing in this country."

The industry website *Manufactura.mx* reported that a corporate representative said industry workers were "contaminated" by the demands for a 20 percent wage increase and that companies anticipate the strikes will spread. The business representative said, "We have an

excellent relationship with the union” and hoped the union would help the company avoid a strike.

According to *Noticieros Televisa*, in “the maquiladora industry in Baja California [where the largest maquiladora city, Tijuana, is located] there is a fear that workers will launch a strike for wage increases.” *Noticieros Televisa* reports that maquiladoras are “maintaining dialogue with the unions of the industry with the goal of avoiding a labor stoppage.”

Workers are both excited by the growth of the strike and concerned that the companies plan to betray whatever agreement they reach.

One Matamoros striker said, “We all have to go out together. The union is afraid that we are uniting. The majority of us are already out. The problem is that the union hasn’t helped us and hasn’t represented us. Now we have to go out and organize guards. We are not asking for gifts, only what we deserve.” The worker said a union official told her “you are nobodies for being out here.”

A striking Kearfott worker told the WSWS, “I’m glad for the new strikers. This is for all workers across the border that have that clause in their contracts” requiring that wages increase in parity with the minimum wage. “The same companies put it there and now they have to pay. We are the most exploited and least rewarded class. I think that it’s time for them to give back to us what they have taken.”

A worker at Autoliv explained to the WSWS that after the company agreed to workers’ demands, “as soon as we went back to work, they began to fire people.”

A worker at Tyco, which also agreed to the wage increase and bonus, told the WSWS there is a growing mood to strike again to protect coworkers from retribution:

“At Autoliv, they are firing a bunch of people without severance or bonus. The manager fires workers and mocks them, telling them that they are not going to pay their bonus or severance. They are being sent to the conciliation and arbitration board and are told that they’ll have to wait half a year or a year to resolve things. Obviously this board is on the side of Autoliv.

“I think that the majority that are now working, many who didn’t even participate in the wildcat strikes, should all strike again to support their fired co-workers.

They are already getting their bonus and raise. We are a new generation that didn’t know how to strike. We have won respect whether people like it or not. Maybe it’s not all the respect we need, but this is our first strike and if things don’t get better, our second strike will be more organized.”

Though the US business press is beginning to report on the impact of the strikes in Mexico from an economic standpoint, the websites of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative as well as the Democratic Socialists of America’s (DSA) *Jacobin* magazine have all ignored the strike entirely. None of these anti-working class, anti-socialist organizations has published a single article on the rebellion of Mexican maquiladora workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact