

For joint action of US, Canadian and Mexican workers

Defend the Matamoros workers!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter

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Two months into the wave of wildcat strikes that has gripped Matamoros, Mexico, US and other foreign-owned corporations, along with the Mexican ruling class, are carrying out collective punishment against the courageous workers in the city, across the border from Brownsville, Texas. The workers have been subjected to mass layoffs, physical attacks and blacklisting because they had the audacity to fight against poverty wages and sweatshop conditions in the factories that produce parts for Ford, GM, Fiat Chrysler and other auto and appliance makers.

The alarm must be raised! The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers throughout the US and Canada to come to the defense of their class brothers and sisters across the border. If the reprisals are not stopped, tens of thousands of workers and their families will be hurled into destitution and raw material for super-exploitation for years to come.

Since January 12, as many as 70,000 workers at Matamoros maquiladora factories have been engaged in a collective revolt, raising the demand for "20-32," i.e., a 20 percent wage increase and a 32,000-peso (\$1,700) bonus. Autoworkers in the US and Canada have been inspired by Mexican workers' defiance of the pro-company trade unions and their initial steps toward forming independent rank-and-file organizations.

Terrified that similar strikes and actions will spread throughout Mexico and across the border, the ruling class is responding with mass firings, plant closings and thug attacks. The companies, the Mexican government and the unions are all seeking to make an example of the strikers in order to show that any opposition to the dictates of the corporations will be met with brutal countermeasures.

Since the strikes began, at least 4,000 workers have been fired and another 50,000 layoffs have been threatened by Mexico's main business organization, the Business Coordinating Council.

Companies such as Michigan-headquartered Joyson Safety Systems, a leading supplier of steering wheels and automotive safety systems, have already announced they are

ceasing production in Matamoros entirely, throwing 800 workers to the streets.

Meanwhile, another business organization, COPARMEX, has proposed legislation to make work stoppages like those in Matamoros illegal under federal law.

In addition to seeking to reverse the impact of any wage concessions they have temporarily granted, the companies and the unions together are targeting workers they have identified as leaders of the strikes and the most militant—including those who have publicly expressed their solidarity with US and Canadian workers through the *World Socialist Web Site*. Where workers are returning to work, they report conditions of shop floor dictatorship, with management seeking to fire workers on the flimsiest of pretexts.

It is time for workers to draw the necessary lessons from these events.

For decades, the United Auto Workers, the Canadian Auto Workers—now Unifor—and other unions have told workers that their enemies are the workers of Mexico, who, the unions claim, are happy to work for poverty wages in order to "steal" the jobs of American and Canadian workers. Now the workers of Mexico are conducting a courageous battle and appealing to their brothers north of the border to join their fight against the multinational corporations.

In opposition to the reactionary nationalism peddled by the unions, the Matamoros workers are proving that the working class is an *international* class connected in a single process of globally integrated production. This is underscored by the fact that the strikes in Matamoros have slowed down production throughout the North American auto industry.

Many of the companies workers have struck are transnational auto parts suppliers, including Fisher Dynamics, Autoliv, Inteva, Joyson Safety Systems, APTIV, Parker, and others. At plants across the US and Canada, autoworkers have reported ongoing production disruptions, along with steering wheel and other parts shortages as a result of the strikes, which the companies and unions have done their best to cover up. Ford in Flat Rock, Chicago, and

Oakville, Ontario; Fiat Chrysler in Windsor; General Motors in Oshawa; and Nissan in Mississippi have all been impacted.

Moreover, the strike wave in Matamoros, one of the largest in North America in decades, is part of the rapid intensification of class struggle around the world in 2019. The first two months of the year have seen city and statewide strikes by teachers in the US, the continuation of the yellow vest protests against inequality in France, and strikes or mass demonstrations in South America, Asia, and Africa, with hundreds of thousands of workers currently on strike in Algeria against the regime of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Mexico in particular is a social powder keg. Teachers in five states have struck this year against education cuts overseen by the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), with some educators blockading rail lines in the western state of Michoacán, halting automotive shipments to a port on the Pacific. In what would be a development with immense significance, as many as 90,000 Walmart workers in the country are threatening to strike later in March.

Not only does the working class all over the world face essentially the same problems—poverty wages, job insecurity, speed-up, management harassment and abuse—it is also objectively connected by a billion threads in an ever-more globally integrated production process.

While workers have become increasingly connected with each other across national borders, the gulf between their interests and those of the global corporations and the super-rich has reached unprecedented proportions. Whether in Oshawa, Detroit, Lordstown, Chongqing, China, or Matamoros, the same ruthless enemy—the capitalist ruling class—seeks to squeeze every ounce of profit from workers and then shutter plants and throw tens of thousands into joblessness as it continually searches for cheaper labor and better rates of return.

No matter how courageous or self-sacrificing, workers cannot fight global corporations merely in one city, nor even one country. The objective international interdependence of the working class and the irresolvable conflict between workers and the companies must be recognized and made the basis of a conscious strategy.

A new strategy requires new organizations. The transnational corporations have for decades relied on the trade unions, whether in Mexico, the US or Canada, in order to maintain “labor peace”—that is, the suppression of strikes and any other forms of struggle by workers. The unions’ corrupt “labor-management partnerships” have gone hand-in-hand with their endless promotion of nationalism, a poisonous divide-and-conquer strategy used to block an

internationally unified struggle of workers.

While promoting anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese chauvinism, the unions have collaborated with the auto bosses in countless plant closures and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs since the 1980s. The latest victims are the workers at the General Motors Lordstown Assembly Plant, which was shuttered last week. Similar plant closings and layoffs are occurring across South America, Europe and Asia.

The struggle in Matamoros developed as a revolt against the Union for Workers in the Maquiladora Industry (SJIOM). In rebelling against the unions and beginning to form new organizations of the rank-and-file, Matamoros workers have provided a demonstration of the colossal power workers have when they begin to take independent action.

This initiative must be expanded: a network of rank-and-file committees independent of the unions must be established across North America, and the organizations initially formed by workers in Matamoros must be broadened throughout the city and made permanent.

It is the urgent duty of all class-conscious workers to come to the defense of the Matamoros strikers. The working class in the United States and Canada cannot advance its interests so long as workers in Mexico are held in conditions of desperate poverty. The defense of workers in Mexico is the defense of *all workers’ interests*.

Workers across the US and Canada must demand an end to the reprisals in Mexico and that all victimized workers be rehired, with full back pay. Workers should inform their co-workers of the situation in Matamoros, popularize their struggle widely on social media, and reach out to their brothers and sisters across the border. Preparations should be made for strike action and mass demonstrations, including at the US and Canadian locations of the companies which are exploiting and victimizing the Matamoros workers.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* and the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees will provide every assistance possible in forging these connections. We urge all workers to email us statements of support for Matamoros workers at autoworkers@wsws.org which we will translate and send to workers in Mexico.



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